# REALLY:TOWARDS A PHOTOREALIST ONTOLOGY OF FACTICITY

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**ABSTRACT**

The overall aim of this investigation is to present a more detailed reading and analysis of 1970s American Photorealism than has been offered by historians and theorists to date. To this end, the thesis reveals and develops the ontological significance of the complex of 'mundane facts' which comprises Photorealist painting: a layered complex of facts which I summarise throughout the thesis as the 'facticity' of the Photorealist artwork.

In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Photorealism on an ontological level, the thesis attends to the four layers which make up all Photorealist paintings, namely: i) the copied photographic 'facts' which comprise the final painting; ii) the plastic 'facts' of the paintings and the methods of their construction; iii) the 'matter-of-fact', quotidian subject matter; and iv) the '(f)act' of beholding the paintings. This analysis is founded on a critical discussion of the three seemingly conflicting art theory components inherent in Photorealist painting: the 'artless', 'objective' photograph; the mechanistic Minimalist construction; and the Pop iconography.

By contending with the peculiar theoretical tensions within the layers of mundane facts, this thesis demonstrates a deeper reading of these seemingly superficial paintings of photographs, and argues for Photorealism to be regarded as a form of painting which brilliantly, and critically, conjoins 'the Real' & 'the Minimal', the photographic & the handmade: deliberate paradoxes which reveal as much about present visual ontologies as they do the debates and frictions between the pictorial and the non-representational which surrounded their making. At this level the investigation is ultimately concerned with the extended meanings of that artwork which gives again, in meticulous, painstaking detail, the quotidian world in which it and the viewer are situated.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction: THE FACTICITY OF PHOTOREALIST PAINTING

This opening section, first of all, briefly locates Photorealism within its art historical context in order to pinpoint the central theoretical concerns which gave rise to, and which inhere in Photorealist painting.[1] This context helps, of course, to describe the structure of Photorealist painting and thus determines, in a way, the structure of the thesis, for the ensuing chapters address in turn the layers of facticity which comprise the images. Secondly, therefore, this Introduction details the discursive elements of each 'layer', setting out the strategy and content of the thesis.

Photorealism first came to the fore of the American art scene in the 1960s,[2] both in California and New York, demonstrating that the aesthetic of the photograph had taken a pre-eminent position within the traditions of painting. The painters, Ralph Goings (b.1928) (fig. 1), Robert Bechtle

**Dairy Queen Interior**
Ralph Goings 1972
**Fig. 1**

[1] Chapter 4 looks in more detail at the connections between Photorealist painting, Pop, Minimalism and Conceptualism, and discusses select works. To identify the salient 'art historical' components here assists in the explanation of the structureof the thesis.

[2] The anthologist of critical writing on Photorealism, Gregory Battcock, notes that a formative exhibition of the 'new Photo-real realism' was "New Realism" at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York, held in December of 1962. This included artists such as Tom Wesselmann (b. 1931), James Rosenquist (b. 1933) and George Segal (b. 1924). In the catalogue essay for this exhibition, the critic John Ashbery pointed out that the underlying 'realist' interest of even these artists was long established: "New Realism is not new. Even before Duchamp produced his first readymade, Apollinaire has written that the true poetry of the age is to be found in the window of a barber shop." So too, perhaps, the window of the diner.

(b.1932) and Richard McLean (b.1934) make up what the dealer and collector Louis K. Meisel termed the "West Coast Photo-Realist Triumvirate"[3] and specialised in painting "gleaming, reflective surfaces - the chrome and glass of shop windows, storefronts, car fenders, mirrors - to produce a somewhat dislocating, hyperreal landscape."[4] On the East coast in New York and Washington respectively, Richard Estes (b. 1936) was producing similarly gleaming paintings of New York buildings and street scenes, whilst Chuck Close (b. 1940) was employing the technique and aesthetic of the photograph to produce giant painted portraits of his friends.

As the art historian Jonathan Fineberg has recently written, "painters such as Richard Estes and Chuck Close used opaque projectors, slides and other mechanical aids to produce an image which seemed technically precise and which had its point of reference in photography (the reproduced image) rather than in nature. This new 'photorealism' fed on the detachment of sixties art - the work of Jasper Johns, minimalism, pop and conceptual art."[5] Underpinning the Photorealist project was, according to the art historian William Seitz, "the perennial battle between abstraction and representation."[6] For Seitz, the rise of Photorealist practices at the tail end of the 1960s (he cites Linda Nochlin's 1968 *Realism Now* show at Vassar College as seminal) was clear indication that the hitherto dominant Greenbergian Formalism was under fatal attack. Not only did the Realists in Nochlin's exhibition[7] all celebrate the depiction of the human figure, most of them had used the

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[3] **Photorealism**, Louis K. Meisel, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980, p.25. This book was the "complete reference work" of Photorealist painting, from its beginnings in the mid-sixties up until 1977. Meisel included in the survey, Bechtle, Charles Bell, Tom Blackwell, Chuck Close, Robert Cottingham, Don Eddy, Estes, Audrey Flack, Ralph Goings, Ron Kleeman, Richard McLean, John Salt and Ben Schonzeit.

[4] **The American Century: Art & Culture 1950-2000,** Lisa Phillips, exh.cat., New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1999, p.274.

[5] **Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being,** Jonathan Fineberg, London: Laurence King, 2000, p.384. It might be interesting to note that, like most other historians of twentieth-century art, Fineberg gives over a very small sub-section to the discussion of Photorealism in his survey; he finishes his entry with reference to the use of symbolic allegory in the work of Audrey Flack as if to cede that at least one of the Photorealists took pains to include substantive narratives.

[6] **Art in the Age of Aquarius**, William C. Seitz, Washington: Smithsonian Institute, 1992, p. 185.

[7] Artists included in *Realism Now* were, among others, Richard Artschwager, Jack Beal, Robert Bechtle, Richard Estes,

camera in some way to establish their compositions. Although many of the emerging Photorealists produced canvases which had flat surfaces no doubt even to Clement Greenberg's taste,[8] the process of acquiring and composing the final image had its roots very much in Pop Art. Seitz sums up this connection - "technically Pop art was a mode of making images from images."[9] This Pop tactic was anathema to Greenberg and fellow formalists, as it drastically played down the expressive aspect of painting and promoted the 'mundane' everyday visual world of media and commerce to the artist's top table.

The Photorealists, as Seitz and Nochlin recognised, were engaged in, at times, an anti-Greenbergian painting and were proposing, along with the Pop artists, that the painter should return to everyday environments and objects to furnish his works. All of the Photorealists' finished paintings were 'images made from images' as they copied photographs to achieve their high illusionism. But the Photorealists' shared method of transposing the photographic source, making use of a 'minimalist' ethic in the process, ensured that the finished paintings were much more than, or at least, much more complex than, a simple sampling of popular culture. It is this complexity, overlooked even by the great champion of Photorealism, Louis K. Meisel,[10] that is the focus of this investigation.

The Photorealists were indeed making images from images, but the construction of the final image introduced a minimalist's processing of 'units' or 'modules', which set up the central paradox at the heart of the Photorealist painting. Also, perhaps more so than most of the 60s American Pop artists, the Photorealists were critically reporting on the camera as a means by which to apprehend the world of the everyday. So, following Pop and

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Sidney Goodman, Alex Katz, Alfred Leslie, Malcolm Morley, Philip Pearlstein and Sidney Tillim.

[8] The formalist preferences of Clement Greenberg are extremely well-known and extremely well-documented. I do not want to dwell on the reasons for these preferences here if the reader will permit. For a detailed discussion and analysis of Greenberg's taste see the canonical essay *Modernist Painting* in **Art & Literature**, no. 4, Spring 1965.

[9] **Art in the Age of Aquarius**, Seitz, 1992, p. 187.

[10] Louis K. Meisel's five point definition of what qualified as a bone fide Photorealist painting is discussed in depth in Chapter 3 as the divergent components of the paintings are identified and analysed for their combined significance.

Minimalism, and with his interest firmly in the quotidian, the Photorealist 'confoundingly' bound-up the everyday imagery with its art historical opposite and based the combination on the 'factual' connotations of the photographic image. This thesis sets out to untangle these three components, to analyse them, and to consider their particular combined impact on the beholder. For what seemed to many like a poor relation to the vigorous montage of Pop, a poor relation to the visual asceticism of Minimalism, and a poor relation to photography proper, actually speaks powerfully about the being of the viewer, then and now, and occupies an important position in the history of 20thC painting in its own right.

This dissertation is concerned primarily with the works of Chuck Close, Richard Estes, Ralph Goings, Don Eddy (b. 1944) Robert Bechtle and Richard McLean. It will make occasional reference to the Hyperrealist sculptures of George Segal (b. 1924) and Duane Hanson (1925-1996), and to other Photorealist painters and other artists of 'painted Realism'. My focus is, however, on the potential meanings of the Photorealist images - a focus on the *combined* significance of; the photographic source and its status as a recorder of verity; the significance of the Minimalist construction, a method imported from a very different contemporaneous aesthetic; and the Pop iconography, a superabundant American visuality. Ultimately, as noted, the thesis is concerned with the potential meaning of 'that artwork which gives again, in meticulous, painstaking detail, the quotidian world in which it and the viewer are situated.' Any potential answering of this concern, must pay equal attention to the divergent elements of abstraction and representation within Photorealism and must see in the very fabric of the works and their imagery not only the battle between the two elements, but also their mutually beneficial conjoining.

Chapter 2 ('The Problematical Concept of Reality') provides a contextual background to the theoretical territories immediately broached when undertaking a study of "Photo" - "Realist" works. Linda Nochlin's 1971, ***Realism*** is referenced to set out a common denominator for the Realist works in this study. The discussion centres round a common project for realist painters: "the truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life,"[11] and addresses the impossibility of this realist manifesto. This Chapter serves then as a necessary caveat to all following discussion, for of course the Photorealist painting is forever representation, but the Photorealist practice of adhering rigorously to the information in the photographic source draws the finished painting slightly closer to Nochlin's agenda than other works of realism in painting.

Chapter 3 ('Mere Visual Facts': The Realist Verity of the Photo-Source') frames in more detail the constituents of the complex of facticity which structure the Photorealist's photographic source-image. Following on from the conditions of Chapter 1, the focus of the analysis is on the nature of the verity of the photograph - the device at the heart of all Photorealist painting. The connotations of the photograph (with specific reference to Barthes's theories of photography) are considered for their impact on the nature of the overall facticity of the finished Photorealist painting.

Chapter 4 ('Photorealist 'Things': Constructed Quotidianity') explores the implications of the Photorealists' usage of a photographic image of quotidianity and the manner in which that image is transposed to a painted canvas. This involves a more focused consideration of the Minimalist and Pop components of the Photorealist image, taking into account therefore the second and third layers of the complex of facticity, if you will.

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[11] **Realism**, Linda Nochlin, London: Penguin, 1971, p. 13.

Chapter 5 ('The (F)act of Beholding: Traumatic Ontology') dramatises the impact of these mundane works on the beholder, and moves towards the intended ontology of facticity. By considering how the Photorealist image is activated, this chapter proposes that the 'colossal illusionism' of the paintings holds the viewer in a 'traumatic limbo'. As the analysis involves the (f)act of beholding the image, close reference will be made to Michael Fried's theory of "theatricality" and also to Roland Barthes's concept of the "traumatic image". These conceptual terms assist a simultaneous consideration of the 'picture' and 'object' of Photorealist painting. An important part of this chapter is the introduction and application of Existentialist thinking apropos the agency of the beholder in the act of beholding the object of 'consciousness' (which is only a step away from Fried's essay). Sartre's isolated self in the face of the world of objects, a close analogy to Fried's model, will be updated with reference to the Photorealist 'object' which, of course, gives again the beholder's everyday world. We will see that this update is informed by Merleau-Ponty's ideas concerning the social self, an agent which comes into being by being in the world; not in perpetual removal from that world, but shaped by its objects and its scenes.

Before this project proceeds to Chapter 2, and a contextualising of conceptual difficulties inherent in any discussion of Realist painting, something more needs to be said about what I mean by *facticity* and its subsequent role in the analysis, especially the implications of the term for the crucial discussion of Chapter 5. For the Sartrean usage of 'facticity' (facticite) invokes a particular oscillation and connection between 'being-for-itself' and 'being-in-itself'.

### 1.1 Facticity

This thesis approaches an ontology of "facticity" through the study of Photorealist paintings, some Hyperrealist sculptures, select comparative examples and historical, contextual materials. My purpose is to convince the reader, firstly, that the layers of seemingly *dry* information in Photorealist and Hyperrealist works *bear analysis,* and, secondly, that the seemingly dry 'data of the everyday' in the works, speak in a powerful way about the *being of the viewer*: hence the use of 'facticity' and 'ontology' in describing the project.

Implicit in this is the thesis that Photorealist and Hyperealist works have not been afforded thorough scrutiny by historians and critics of twentieth century art. As a result of this lack of scrutiny, the potential of these objects to inform and enhance a reading of the *being* or, perhaps, *ontology*, of the viewer has not been released. The ultimate purpose of this thesis is to release the philosophical potential of the works: to look *at* and *beyond* the seemingly dry quotidianity of the paintings, in order to facilitate their contribution to a critical discussion about the *being of fact* and *the fact of the being of the viewer*. An aspect of the being of the viewer is generated in the face of the hyper-illusionistic artwork, an artwork which *gives again* the quotidian world of the viewer. The word *facticity,* as noted above, refers to a complex of 'aspects of visual facts'. Photorealist painters play with this 'complex of visual facts' in a way which is singular, I argue, in 20thC art practice. The term also alludes to aspects of Sartre's Existentialism as set out in ***Being and Nothingness.***[12] Sartre's treatise is incredibly dense, and I will not attempt a lengthy elaboration here in

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[12] **Being and Nothingness**, Jean-Paul Sartre, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, 1958, first published in French 1943.

parenthesis. However, this thesis benefits from calling upon Sartre's usage of the term 'facticité'. A brief explanation of the meaning of his usage is apt, as it will come to inform the 'traumatic limbo' in which the beholder finds himself in the face of the Photorealist work which we will discover in Chapter 5.

My allusion to Sartre's work brings to bear the separateness but connectedness of two critical conditions of 'being': "being-for-itself" and "being-in-itself." In essence it is the particular 'simultaneity' invoked by Sartre which is of tremendous significance to this study, but his terms also describe *locations* for being which have impact on my reading of the ontology of facticity in the face of that image which 'gives again the everyday world in painstaking detail'. 'Being' in principal, according to Sartre, contains both being-for-itself and being-in-itself. Put simply, at great risk naturally, being-for-itself is a being which *locates* itself by defining itself by what it is not. It is a negation of being-in-itself which is a being which merely *is*. I trust that the connections will become clearer as the thesis moves forward, but I will quickly relate these two concepts directly to the Photorealist work.

The meaning of the layers of 'mundane facts' comes about only when the beholder considers his agency in the face of the works. This involves recognising that what Photorealism presents, on one level, is a blatant giving of what simply *is*. The being-in-itself is referenced by the fact that, of Photorealism and its replication of what is already there, "strictly speaking we can say of it only that it is."[13] In this way the Photorealist image gives the beholder the being of the world in-itself. To introduce Fried's concepts of theatricality is to bring in the being-for-itself as the beholder is confronted by 'his' being-for-itself by being, as Fried makes clear, *not* the objectness of the artwork in its space. The oscillation, and permanent dual presence, of these states is what I allude to on

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[13]From Hazel Barnes's Key to Special Terminology, ibid., 1958, p. 630.

the secondary level of my usage of the term facticity, and indeed what Sartre himself implied with his application of the term - facticity is "the for-itself's necessary connection with the in-itself."[14]

As the dramatisation of the works unfolds, it will engage with this complex of facticity, and its Existential implications, to be found at the heart of Photorealist works: a complex which comprises four aspects or layers, namely, i) 'Mere' Visual Facts, ii) Photorealist 'Things', iii) Picturing the Quotidian, and iv) The (F)act of Beholding.

### 1.2 'Mere' Visual Facts

Perhaps the salient component of facticity within the Photorealist work is the appearance of the visual data, the 'mere visual facts', from the artist's photo-source. Photorealist painting (and this can rightly sound Platonic, for as we will see in Chapter 3, the dealer, collector and cataloguer, Louis K. Meisel set out the collective definition for Photorealist painting in some detail) is a type of painting which adheres to the visual facts (data pixels) of the photo-source from which the painting is constructed. The 'mere' visual facts of the photo-source are "rendered" by the Photorealist from photograph to canvas. Writing about Ralph Goings's Photorealism, Louis Meisel, in 1980, addresses this process:

> *Goings uses a word for his work which bears some investigation. The word is "render." In almost every interview and discussion, he says, "I render," or "My concern has always been with rendering." While "rendering" has been*

[14]Ibid. 1954, p. 631.

*traditionally been used in a derogatory sense to describe painters, and has been associated with illustration and architectural drawing, I believe that to Goings it means the craft of copying with exacting care.*[15]

To adhere to the mere visual facts of the photo-source is not to presume that the photo-source contains indisputable fact, for the photograph can be altered as we know: the pixels can come to picture *some* thing other than *the* thing which generated their initial appearance on the film. However, clearly central to Photorealism is the painters' interest in mechanically reproducing the *given* photographic data, as it appeared in the source photograph. The American art critic Linda Chase, writing in 1975, pinpoints this central concern:

*The Photo Realist replaces the artist's personal interpretative vision with the recording of visual fact; he replaces the subjectivity of the artist's eye with the objectivity of the camera's lens.*[16]

Whether the source is the photograph, used by the painter, or the mould, used by the sculptor, the artist meticulously transposes the visual or physical facts of that source. Robert

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[15] **Photorealism**, Louis K. Meisel, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980, p. 274.

[16] Linda Chase, *Existentialist vs. Humanist Realism*, in **Superrealism: a Critical Anthology**, Gregory Battcock (ed.), New York: Dutton, 1975, p.85. It should be noted here that although I concentrate on the works of a select few male Photorealists, there were a number of female Photorealists also. The art historian Linda Nochlin, author of **Realism**, 1971, wrote about the work of some of the female Photorealists, see *Some Women Realists*, **Arts Magazine**, New York, February 1974. In looking at the subject matter of the female Photorealists she asked the telling question, "to what degree should realist works be read as iconological symbols - that is conveyors of unconsciously or semiconsciously held attitudes or ideas and, more specifically, as conveyors of unequivocally feminine world views?" Although I do not consider the gender issues resident in the subject matter of the Photorealists, I do consider the 'world view' conveyed by the 'super abundance' of quotidian detail to be found in many Photorealist paintings; especially works by Don Eddy (b.1944).

Bechtle describes the way in which the photo-source is used in the construction of the Photorealist painting:

> *I think of the photograph as a kind of structure or system for the painting which limits the choices of color and placement. It allows me to keep some of the traditional concerns of the painter - drawing, composition, colour relationships - from assuming too important a role, for they are not what the painting is about.*[17]

**Santa Barbara Motel**
Robert Bechtle 1977
**Fig. 2**

Crucially, there is negligible *artistic intervention* and mediation on the part of the Photorealist in this process. His task is to transpose the data as they are presented by the source; coolly and mechanically. Although, of course, one could always make the point that any artist exercises the powers of selection at some stage during the construction of the work, the Photorealists really did adhere to what they saw as the *visual instruction manual,* comprising the dry visual data held within the photo-source. In this they were unique within twentieth-century painting, (although 'related' to some projects of Performance and Conceptual art as will be mentioned) and distinct within the lineage of painted Realism. Bechtle's Santa Barbara Motel 1977 (fig. 2), for example, is the product of a meticulous

[17]Robert Bechtle quoted in, **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 27.

rendering of a 6"x8" photograph 'on' which was recorded the light reflected from woman, cup, table, building and so on. Bechtle, typically, has reproduced all of the pixellated data presented on the surface of the photographic image. In this way the Photorealist replicates the 'objective', (as far as that can be maintained, an issue to be discussed in Chapter 2) 'factual' data of the photo-source which comprise the subject matter of Photorealism. This process of replication is noted by the art historian, Jonathan Fineberg. He hints at potential causation and meaning of this seemingly redundant replication:

> *The photograph no longer simply fixed the subject, it became the subject in its intriguing intervention between the painter and the motif. This new "photorealism" fed on the detachment of sixties art - the work of Jasper Johns, minimalism, pop and conceptual art.*[18]

This element of detachment will be considered in more detail in the subsection, 'The Cultural Moment', in Chapter 3. Particular to the 'detachment' evident in Photorealism and Pop art is that this quality feeds back into the ways in which we are invited to apprehend and understand the pictorial aspects of the finished paintings.

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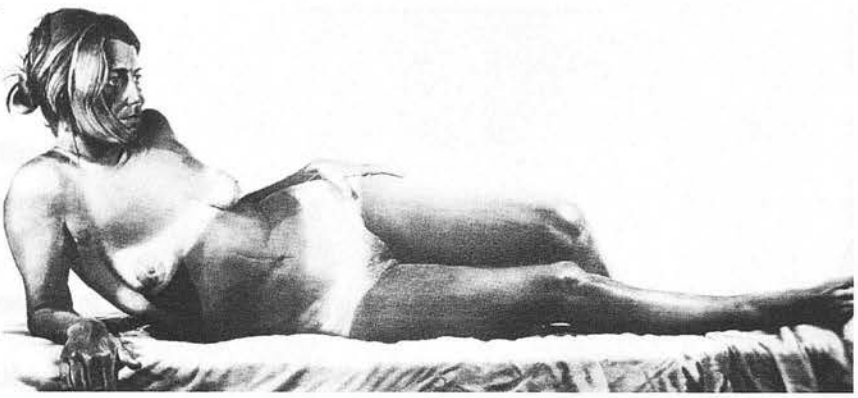
[18] **Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being,**, Fineberg, 2000, p. 384.

### 1.3 Photorealist Things

There exists a series of objects in the everyday world known as Photorealist paintings which can be visited and witnessed. This layer of the complex of facticity seems redundantly superficial - but it serves to restate the importance of the *observation of the mundane* in a thorough analysis of Photorealist works. This is particularly important when analysing paintings which picture the world with *trompe l'oeil* aplomb, for such images can 'conceal' their status as replications. The Photorealist painter, Neil Welliver (b. 1929) acknowledged the unavoidable fact of the 'mundane existence' of the painting as an object: "With my work there is always the resistance of the surface of the painting. The fact of the painting is always in the way."[19] The mundane fact that the painting 'is always in the way', creates friction with the 'impulse' of the *trompe l'oeil* painting to conceal its status as replication.



**Big Nude**
Chuck Close 1967-68
**Fig. 3**

This curious partnership between the conceit of exact replication and the painted object is particularly evident with Photorealist paintings of large dimensions. Chuck Close's

[19]Neil Welliver quoted in, **American Visions: The Epic History of Contemporary Art**, Robert Hughes, New York: Knopf, 1997, p. 554. This mundane layer of facticity is especially relevant with reference to a Minimalist conception of 'viewing the art *object*', to be discussed in the subsection of Chapter 3, 'Minimalist Formation'.

first attempt at the Photorealist method of rendering the information of the photo-source, Big Nude 1967-68 (fig. 3), was carried out on a canvas 9' 9" x 21' 2". This vast canvas can, even if only for an instant, belie its *objectness* by virtue of a meticulous tromp l'oeil image upon its surface. This obvious and critical aspect of Photorealist painting (of any highly illusionistic painting) is addressed in more detail come Chapter 4,[20] because it sets up an interesting oscillation between the painting as representation and the painting as a real object, a real thing in its own right.

### 1.4 Picturing the Quotidian

Thirdly, the subject matter of the Photorealist painting is born from the abundance of the quotidian held within the photo-source. This *everydayness* ensures that the subject matter in the photo-source is not allegorical, mythological, metaphorical or even *unusual*. The quotidian facts of ordinary people surrounded by ordinary objects are asserted in the artworks of Photorealism. Of course, very much part of the argument herein is that the combination of the *seemingly* objective, mundane everydayness with the paradoxical method of construction, gives rise to something of ontological significance; the giving again of the eveyday in the Photorealist manner creates, in the act of beholding the works, something more powerful than the simple recognition of the everyday scenes depicted. And yet, from another perspective, the subject matter of Photorealism is banal. Whether it is a woman enjoying a cup of tea on a patio in Bechtle's Santa Barbara Motel 1977 (fig. 2) or some lunch in Ralph Goings's Diner with Red Door 1979 (fig. 4), the subject matter is

[20] In particular 4.4 "Oscillation - Collapse within the Photorealist Analogon".

frequently that of mundane activities, carried out by ordinary people, to seemingly no profound effect. In Goings's painting here, even the possibility of an engaging narrative somehow arising from 'absent presences' or presences yet to enter the scene, seems implausible, or at least, *un-evidenced.* The moment chosen (by way of the artist's choice of photographic source) is one which deliberately holds little in the way of narrative hooks or symbols. Goings, of course, accentuates this banality with the title - this is merely a diner with a red door. The solitary figure reading the menu is no more important than the red of the door, with the meticulous transposition of the myriad detail perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the work.

**Diner with Red Door**
Ralph Goings 1979
**Fig. 4**


**Supreme Hardware**
Richard Estes 1974
**Fig. 5**

Richard Estes rarely includes figures in his works, it must be said, but in his Photorealist painting he attends to similarly mundane, everyday settings and contexts; the neighbourhood shops for example in Supreme Hardware 1974 (fig. 5). Of course, for non-American viewers these images may be exotic; replete with myth and allure, especially,

perhaps, the New York cityscapes of Estes. That apart, following Fineberg's prompting,[21] this "ordinariness" calls to mind the wishes of Claes Oldenburg (b. 1929), when he famously pleaded in 1961:

> *...for art that embroils itself with the everyday crap and still comes out on top; for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, that twists and extends and accumulates and spits and drips, and is heavy and course and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself.*[22]

This fascination with the everyday connects directly with older forms of realist painting, and the impulse of Nochlin's Realist painter, perhaps. The connection to Realism is emphasised by the Californian Photorealist painter Ralph Goings:

> *Reality is possessed of a visual order and logic at once more dynamic and more subtle than any vista I can contrive. I try to achieve this splendor as objectively as possible and render it with believable authenticity. Realist painting provides an occasion to visually savour reality.*[23]

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[21] See page 19 above.

[22] Claes Oldenburg, *I am For an Art, 1961* in **Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings**, Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (eds.), California: University of California Press, 1996, p.335.

[23] Ralph Goings quoted in, **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 275.

Such sentiment gives licence to the artist to paint an assortment of donuts, as did Ben Schonzeit (b. 1942) with Donuts 1973 (fig. 6)., or, as John Salt (b. 1937) did, a parked car beside a brick wall (fig. 7). Schonzeit's painting, especially, reminds us that the quotidian iconography of Photorealism is frequently that of the American Pop artists of the 1960s. At the core of the imagery (the paintings of Chuck Close do provide one interesting exception here) is *everyday Americanness*.[24] As Fineberg says, there is a coolness within the process of Photorealism which can be seen in works by Jasper Johns and the Minimalists, but there is also evident a ready and knowing (patriotic?) engagement with Americana. This iconography is the everyday of the American diner, cafe, automobile, store motorhome and so forth. Connections can be made, therefore, with earlier versions of an overtly American Realism. One might compare Ben Schonzeit's painting of donuts to, for example, Norman Rockwell's (1894-1978) painting of a Thanksgiving meal entitled, Freedom From Want 1943 (fig.

**Donuts**
Ben Schonzeit 1973
**Fig. 6**

**Blue Chrysler with Brick Wall**
John Salt 1978
**Fig. 7**

[24]It might be said that even Chuck Close's paintings of the 1970s contained an everyday Americanness by a different route, as he painted numerous well-known Americans of that time: Philip Glass and Klaus Kertess, for examples.

8). The America of the 1970s provided a similar bountifulness, only the enormous turkey has been replaced by the enormous pile of sweet donuts. Schonzeit cast a wry, 'Pop look' at the selections and displays which American capitalism presented in its urban centres. Interestingly, Louis K. Meisel argued for Schonzeit's painting to be seen as colourfield or all-over painting - claiming connections to Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg in their championing of American Abstract Expressionism. There was evidently a celebration of Americanness, couched in the bountiful banalities of American plentifulness: an *abundance of quotidianity* one might say - the third structural component of the complex of facticity.

**Freedom from Want**
Norman Rockwell 1943
**Fig. 8**

### 1.5 The F(act) of Beholding

The fourth component of the complex is the least physical (in one sense) as it concerns the engagement of the viewer in the face of the work with the conflation of the first three aspects of facticity. The fourth component arises from the combination of the first three pragmatic aspects of facticity with the (f)act of *viewing* the Photorealist object. In considering the meaning and effect of the first three components on the beholder the analysis moves towards an ontological reading of the works in question.

To speculate about the nature of this ontology is the ultimate aim of this study, which is interested in the conflation of the 'make-up' of the Photo/Hyperrealist work with theories of how artworks are apprehended by the viewer. Here I will use theories of the

photograph and critical theory (from, in the main, Michael Fried) to examine the position of the viewer (literally and metaphorically) in post-war American art (see Chapter 4 'The (F)act of Beholding: Traumatic Ontology').

The discursive combination of all four structural components, therefore, moves towards my intended *ontology of facticity*: the reenactment, the dramatization, the reconstruction of the *peculiar (f)act of being in the face of the Photo/Hyperrealist work.* This involves a phenomenological inquiry into the ontology of facticity: in a way, a process of critical speculation. The spirit of this speculation might best be explained by way of a reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 1962 summation of the essence of Phenomenological inquiry:

> *What is phenomenology? It may seem strange that this question has still to be asked half a century after the first works of Husserl. Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and world from any starting point other than that of their facticity.*[25]

Implicit in the combined discussion of these four components of facticity - the discussion of the ontology of facticity - is the central motive for this thesis: that more needed to be said about the ways in which these paintings and sculptures can be interpreted to do justice to the powerful significance of this kind of meticulous re-presentation of the quotidian. For

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[25] **Phenomenology of Perception**, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, trans. Colin Smith, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1962, p. vii.

me, clear evidence that this is the case is to be found in Robert Storr's catalogue essay for the 1998 MOMA retrospective of the paintings of Chuck Close. Storr writes (with specific reference to Chuck Close, of course, but with more general relevance to Photorealist processes of 'rendering' the facticity of the photo-source):

> *Other camps have chosen to ignore him (Close) because, hewing no aesthetic party line, by virtue of his multi-media practice, bridges gaps which some would prefer to keep wide apart. Thus the partisans of technologically oriented modes of modernist or postmodernist art at war with studio traditions find it inconvenient that a painter who persists in the endeavour should also be the one who has analyzed the photomechanical image in such depth and detail. Rather than deal forthrightly with this anomaly, and so risk the revision of dogma Close's cross-fertilizing activities would require, the avowed disciples of Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes pass over his work with barely a murmer.*[26]

Storr refers here to the 'troublesome', paradoxical combination of mechanistic process and studio tradition, a combination which applies to all the Photorealists (and Hyperrealists) in this study, and which no doubt accounts for a 'neglect', or at least an incomplete reading, of many more works than only those of Chuck Close. Couple this anomalous combination with the abundance of quotidian imagery and you have a movement whose images have an identity crisis: neither wholly dispassionately mechanistic, nor full of emotion, and, in terms

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[26] **Chuck Close**, Robert Storr, exh. cat., New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1998, p. 23. A brief consultation of the contents and bibliography of any recent survey of post-war art will demonstrate that there are very few texts dedicated to the "ism", and few chapters in surveys given over to close analysis of the movement. David Hopkins in his recent survey of art post-1945 makes note of this dearth in his section on further reading: "The 'Photorealism' of the 1960s was the subject of Gregory Battcock's anthology *Super Realism: A Critical Anthology* (New York, 1995), as well as a lavishly illustrated study, *Photo-realism* by Louis K. Meisel (New York, 1980). Little has appeared since."(**After Modern Art: 1945-2000**, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 257.)

of construction and iconography, neither wholly Minimalist nor wholly Pop. Writing about the work of Chuck Close, the American critic Andy Grundberg identified the same troublesome paradox within the Photorealist project as did Storr:

> *The rise in the late 1960s of the painting style known as Photorealism seemed, for anyone devoted to photography, quite inexplicable. Why, given the availability of photographic technology and the ubiquity of photographs themselves, go to all the trouble of painting something to look like a photograph? For many photographers, the products of Photorealism were an affront to the integrity of their medium. And for many painters, photorealist paintings were lame hybrids, debased by their uncritical acceptance of photographic appearances.*[27]

As Chapter 5 will show, there is good reason, beyond simply proving Storr right and developing Grundberg's observations, to apply the photo theory of Roland Barthes to the study of Chuck Close's paintings. The usage of the photographic image is absolutely fundamental to the construction of the works, and, of course, the semiotic structures of the photographic image are central to any potential meaning the finished paintings may have on an ontological level.

Storr is also right to suggest that devotees of Walter Benjamin should react coolly to the paintings of Close and other Photorealists, for the mechanistic transposition of the photo-source in the making of the final images seems too complicit with processes of mechanical reproduction. Because the practice of reproduction, or replication, is at the very

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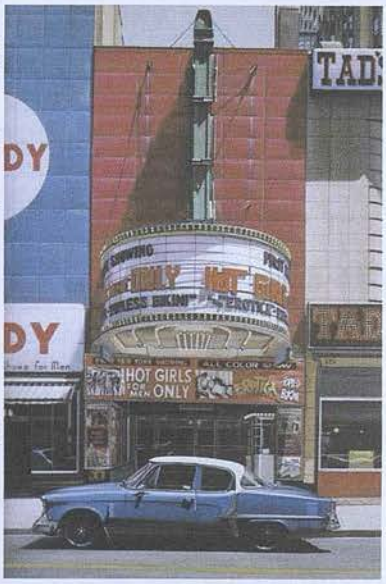
[27] *Chuck Close's Hyperbolic Verisimilitude*, New York Times, February 2, 1985 reprinted in **Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography Since 1974,** Andy Grundberg, New York: Aperture Foundation, 1999, p. 110.

heart of all Photorealist works, one might say that the Photorealist scotches the potential aura of the work of art by basing its inner construction on mechanical replication. As Benjamin wrote in 1936, "One might generalize by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence."[28] The finished Photorealist painting does exist as a unique object, but what kind of uniqueness can it lay claim to when each of its component brushmarks has been reproduced mechanistically with reference to a photographic image which itself replicates blatantly the trivia of an industrialized world?

For example, paintings such as John Salt's Blue Chrysler with Brick Wall 1978 (fig. 7) appear impenetrably banal. The brick wall seems to add insult to the injury caused by the initial and brutal presentation of the mundane in a mechanistic manner. How does one enter such a scene, and what meaning might be found if this were at all possible? Some caution is needed, for 'circumventing' the brick wall which is literally presented in this kind of illusionistic work presents, should not involve a hermeneutics of evasion. In fact, the brick wall of high illusionism is more interesting if tackled head-on, not bypassed. To proceed successfully into these scenes, interpretive knowledge needs to be gleaned from criticism of Realism, Pop, Minimalism and Conceptualism, as Richard Estes's (b.1936)

[28] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', reprinted in **Illuminations**, Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt (ed.), London: Pimlico, 1999, first published in the Frankfurt Institute Journal, 1936.

imagery might suggest (fig. 9);[29] for the gritty, downtown-realist setting meets a Minimalist form of construction *and* the mass culture visual 'staples' of Pop art. These connections will be made in Chapter 4 ('Minimalist Formation', 'Pop Pre-formation'.)




**Hot Girls**
Richard Estes 1968
**Fig. 9**

The meaning and significance of the works in this enquiry, logically, are in some way partly determined by the meaning and significance of those 'isms' which informed and negated the Photorealist/Hyperrealist artefact - and "ways of seeing" imported from the study of Pop, Conceptualism and so on, will be examined in Chapter 4. This practice will not exhaust interpretive possibilities but it will position Photorealism amongst Pop and Minimalism in a more intelligible and 'theoretically rounded' way than has previously been achieved.

The unusual relationship Photorealism has with Pop art and Minimalism has already been 'discovered':[30] I argue, rather, that the works, because of their complex facticity, *deserve* to be placed as *active* participants, not just in the history of twentieth-century painting and sculpture but also in debates concerning replication and ontology.

In one way, at least, the very structure of the paintings provides this introduction with an explanatory model. Simultaneously active in each painting is the coherent, finished

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[29]I do engage, on occasions, with the artworks in 'imaginative sympathy', allowing them, expediently, to speak to the contemporary in ways perhaps never intended by their creators - certainly the case in the analysis of Richard Estes's paintings - but I do not base any hermeneutic engagement on an unmodified, Derridan dictate that "texts are marked by instability and indeterminancy of meaning."

[30]For examples, see Gregory Battcock's introduction to **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980; also *Realism Now*, Linda Nochlin, exh. cat., New York: Vassar College Art Gallery, 1968 and John Perreault's introduction to **Richard Estes: The Complete Paintings**, Louis K. Meisel, New York: Harry Abrams, 1986.

image of the blue chrysler, or the cinema, or the shopfront, or whatever, *and* the modular mark of fabrication, at the level of the canvas surface. In parallel, this study shifts deliberately from the level of the canvas surface to the abstract and metaphysical level of ontology. As a result, a hermeneutic conundrum arises - how to know the *parts* of construction without foreknowledge of the *whole* 'picture', and how to know about the whole without foreknowledge of the parts. This conundrum is further problematised by those Photorealist paintings and Hyperrealist sculptures which 'conceal' their construction from that viewing position which reveals the whole, coherent, final image.

By acknowledging, and contending with, the apparent conflict between the nature of the construction of the works and the final, whole image. I have attempted to release the potential of the works from 'behind the brick wall', calling upon a representative raft of examples from Photorealist and Hyperrealist practice, in the elaboration of 'whole' propositions. In which case, this study does not put forward a 'whole' analysis of any Photorealist's or Hyperrealist's oeuvre, rather it attempts to address a 'whole' theoretical hermeneutics by way of scrutiny of selected works. Where there are fundamental differences between Photorealist practices (one example being the contrasting imagery in the paintings of Chuck Close and Richard Estes) these differences are displayed, and no claim is made for any one artist's work being wholly representative of Photorealist art. For the purposes of this *thesis*, 'facticity' is deemed to be a sensible and sustainable 'lowest common demoninator' within Photorealist and Hyperrealist practice.

So, in proposing a possible hermeneutics of Photorealism, I invoke a kind of hermeneutic circle - and, indeed, the oscillation between the 'whole' and the 'parts' forms an important theoretical framework in my exegesis. This hermeneutic circle is found at another level also. Certain features within Photorealism and Hyperrealism have become

(again) salient features in an art world which has played to so much of Postmodern literature and methodology. Photorealism is a practice which embodies aspects of unique craft and Postmodern simulation: with these counterpoints in mind I will contrast the Photorealist canvas with works which might be emblematic of a Modernist, or more traditionally crafted version of 'the real' as well as with Postmodernist examples. I also see Photorealism as embracing both Pop iconography and Minimalist aesthetics, and I see Photorealism as a movement which sought to articulate an ontology of facticity which deserves to be more properly explained with a view to connecting this ontology to contemporary thinking.

In this way, or from this method, the thesis presents, I believe, a phenomenological inquiry. I intend to approximate what might be classed as the 'eidetic essence' of the facticity visible within Photorealist works. Eidetic reduction is a process within phenomenology which intends to go beyond the contingent factual aspects of an object or experience of enquiry to the essence of that object or experience. Clearly it involves a speculative move at the stage of proposing essences in the face of differing objects. My usage of this term heralds one strand of Chapter 5 which is the speculative, or poetic, dramatization of the essence of the select Photorealist paintings which comprise this study.

To carry out this inquiry I call upon a variety of examples from within the corpus of Photorealist (and some Hyperrealist) works, but also from associated 'idioms of Realism and Naturalism' from the history of images. By keeping the essential mystery of facticity in mind as the primary objective in this exegesis, and by (necessarily) addressing the plastic products of Photorealism and Hyperrealism, I engage with the two, seemingly conflicting, aspects of a phenomenological inquiry: *essence* and *material existence*. For, as said, the materiality of the marks and processes which comprise the Photorealist and Hyperrealist

work help shape an interpretive understanding of the whole or essence of that body of works. I will 'table' the complexities of the phenomenological materiality of the paintings at the 'same' time as broaching what is ultimately important in terms of the 'eidetic' essence of the works.

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In the following chapter, i.e. Chapter 2 ('The Problematical Concept of Reality'), I will contextualise the ensuing discussion of the Photo-*Realist* image by addressing the inherent difficulties in sensibly 'speaking' about the 'Real'. To achieve this the claims laid by Realist painters to *objectivity* and *truth*, with reference to Nochlin, will be critically analysed. In so doing, a position will be given on the aspects of the 'real' and of the 'representation' which are tightly bound together *inside* the Photorealist canvas, and also, of course, in the mind of the viewer who is faced with the tremendous illusionism of trompe l'oeil picturing. As alluded to above, although each canvas clearly oscillates between being invisible behind its representation and a being clearly an object in itself, the viewer of the works might oscillate between acknowledging that what they witness is a representation and believing that what they witness is the real thing. The photographic source has a central role to play in this deception - this blurring of the real and the representation.

## Chapter 2 REALLY: THE PROBLEMATICAL CONCEPT OF REALITY

At this stage this thesis ought to state the obvious: it is impossible for the painter or sculptor or photographer to transparently 'capture' the real. Whatever the elusive nature of the term 'real', and that which it represents - reader and author can accept, as did the Photorealist and Hyperrealist artists themselves, that something of the 'real' will forever remain outside the art copy. Linda Nochlin makes this point clear at the outset of ***Realism*** (1971):

> *In painting, no matter how honest or unhackneyed the artist's vision may be, the visible world must be transformed to accommodate it to the flat surface of the canvas...Even in photography, which comes closer to fulfilling the demand for 'transparency', the photographer's choice of viewpoint, length of exposure, size of focal opening and so on, intervene between the object and the image printed on paper.*[31]

Any subsequent reference made, by me or by cited authors, to the 'transparent capturing of the real' must be tempered by this rider, for its caution is necessarily everpresent in the discourse surrounding art and the representation of the real. In addition, any inquiry into the Realist aspects of visual artworks has a more serious problem to contend with; Nochlin, once more, makes this manifest: " A basic cause of the confusion bedevilling the notion of Realism is its ambiguous relationship to the highly problematical concept of reality."[32] This

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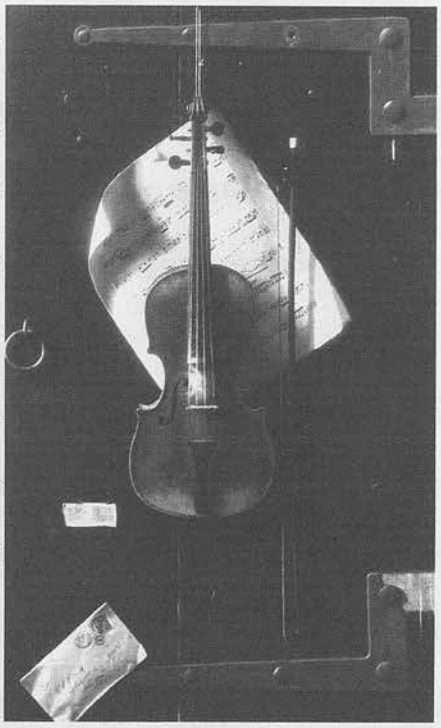
[31] **Realism**, Nochlin, 1971, p. 13.

[32] ibid., 1971, p. 13.

ambiguity can 'allow' claims to Realism on behalf of a diverse range of painting: the Social Realist paintings of Gustave Courbet and Winslow Homer (1836-1910); the still-life painting of Picasso and William M. Harnett (1846-1892) (fig. 10); also, the landscapes of Andrew Wyeth (b. 1917) and the cityscapes of Richard Estes, for example. Such works might be seen as equally 'realist' - despite the very different means of plastic and conceptual construction. The confusion is in part caused by differing attitudes to the status of the world of appearances.



**The Old Violin**
William M. Harnett 1886
**Fig. 10**

The world of 'mere appearances' has been decried in the Platonic traditions of the West by many artists and philosophers: mere appearances cannot provide proper 'truths', so the argument runs. The world of truth, or the world of consistency, free from contradiction, exists somewhere above and beyond, or behind, or beneath the world of mere appearance. If the world of appearances - the natural everyday world which we inhabit - is connected to, yet masked from, the world of the real by some metaphysical membrane, then for many Modern artists their goal was to pierce this membrane, experience the world of deeper truth and 'report back' to lesser mortals. This supports, for example, Kandinsky and Dada, as well as Picasso *et al.* This positioning was described by Kandinsky in 1913, in a style typical of Modern artists' musings on their role as 'divine mediator'. He articulates the straddling of the everyday world and the noumenal

world which is required of the Modernist artist, and lays down the claim of Modernism that has art as an autonomous operation, closed in its own systemic legitimization:

> *Thus did I finally enter the realm of art, which like that of nature, science, political forms etc., is a realm unto itself, is governed by its own laws proper to it alone, and which together with the other realms ultimately forms that great realm which we can only dimly divine.*[33]

The true Modern artist, according to this position, corresponds conceptually *with* the other side of the membrane between the world of appearances and the world of objective truth. The Modernist paintings made by Kandinsky and others in response to this positioning are believed to 'hold knowledge' whilst the 'inferior' Photorealist painting, by contrast, would be regarded as a painting which merely 'sees'. William Harnett's (1848-1892) Old Violin 1886, for example, a precursor of 20thC Photorealism, is to its own detriment, according to Kandinsky's thesis, irredeemably linked to the everyday world of material things. What is more, Harnett has afforded the 'trivia' of the scene great care and attention through his highly illusionistic technique.

The world of 'mere' appearances, within a dualistic model comprises only subjects; a table, a chair, cars and so forth. Each subject must have a corresponding pure form. This pure form, the consistent and objective form, is classed as the *predicate*.[34] All imperfect, idiosyncratic instances of chair, for example, correspond to an overarching predicate of Chair: an essential form which transcends the quotidian and earthly. Not only do these

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[33]Wassily Kandinsky *Reminiscences* 1913, quoted in, **Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction: The Early Twentieth Century**, Harrison, Frascina, Perry, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 219.

[34]This dualistic model of material things versus "essential forms" is set out in Plato's **Republic**. See trans. H. D. P. Lee, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974, pp. 472-480.

examples of nouns have corresponding predicates - abstract qualities have predicates also in this metaphysics. Thus there will be consistent and objective predicates beyond the earthly materialisation of melancholy, woe, elation and hope, or whatsoever. But by remaining, in glorious opticality,[35] firmly *within* the world of 'mere' things the Photorealist depictions seem to flout the Modernist ideal which would have art attend to the evocation or approximation of predicates. Photorealist painting has been castigated as only pure visuality, trapped uncritically in the immediate here and now, a frigid version of a Pop opticality - immersed in a particularly 'seductive' world of consumable appearances. The American art critic H. D. Raymond, writing for ***Arts Magazine*** in 1974, questioned the 'moral vision' of the Photorealists, and challenged indirectly the appeal of the material 'goods' of Pop culture :

> *These new - er Newer - Realists depict a fallen world with a fallen technique. They offer a universe of phenomenon from which all traces of the numinous have been drained. Only matter is represented and only the surface characteristics of brittle matter. The spirit or force that has preoccupied painters of the great tradition and given their works its energy has been scrupulously excluded.*[36]

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[35]By using this word 'opticality' I preempt the discussion in subsections 'Epistemology of Visuality', Chapter 2 and 'Minimalist Formation', Chapter 3, which include reference to the theories of Michael Fried and his critique of Clement Greenberg's usage of 'opticality' in describing 'advanced' painting of the 1960s. Fried wrote of Greenberg's germinal 1961 essay *Modernist Painting*: "as in *Modernist Painting* 'opticality' is contrasted with its traditional antithesis, 'tactility'." (Michael Fried, **Art and Objecthood**, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998, p. 21.) I argue in chapter 4 that the Photorealist image does indeed hold the viewer in an 'anti-tactile' opticality, in the thrall of the spectacle of quotidian capitalist imagery, but also that the mechanistic, Minimalist formation of the works builds in a tactility which co-exists and creates friction with the pictorial aspects of the paintings. In this paradoxical way, and in others, Photorealist painting can be seen to satisfy a Greenbergian 'optical' demand and also a Friedian 'theatrical' demand.

[36]H. D. Raymond, *Beyond Freedom, Dignity and Ridicule*, **Arts Magazine**, Vol. 48, No. 5, 1974.

Pop art, likewise, suffered similar criticism (and acclamation), for its subject matter was very much rooted in the immediately available world of 'mere' *subjects*. Robert Hughes writes about Pop art in terms of its hedonistic acceptance of the world of (commercial) appearances:

> *Instead of recoiling from the commonplace and commercial, the new generation of painters embraced both, in a spirit of cool and rather detached irony. There was no point in fighting Gargantua, the vast desire industry of of advertising and promotion and mass production. Gargantua* ***was*** *American culture now. Forty years earlier, Dadaists and Surrealists had been fascinated by this too, but Pop art dived into it with a kind of wallowing abandon.*[37]

Hughes seems critically paralysed by the visual insistence on the superficial world of appearances, ignoring potential critical comment built in to the deadpan rendering of material things. He also excludes the potential significance of composite Pop images such as Allan D'Arcangelo's American Madonna # 1 1962 (fig. 11). This image employs a number of American stereotypes, not with wallowing abandon, but with critical effect. D'Arcangelo undermines visual paradigms (the stars and stripes and details from Grant

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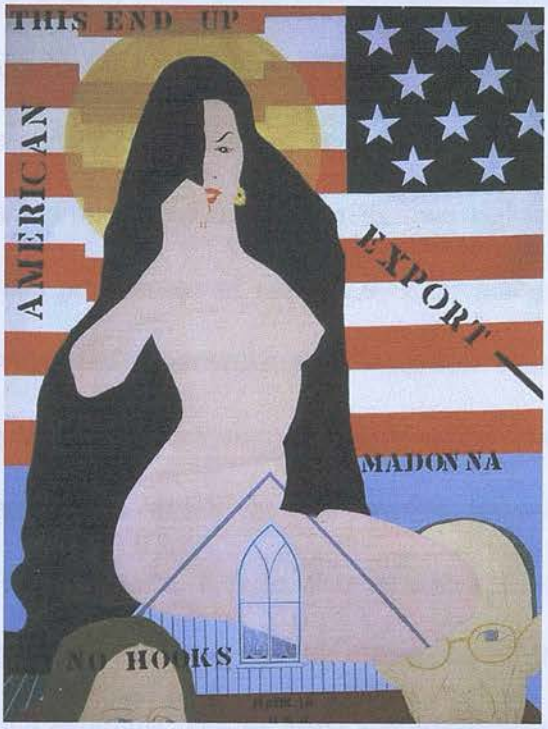
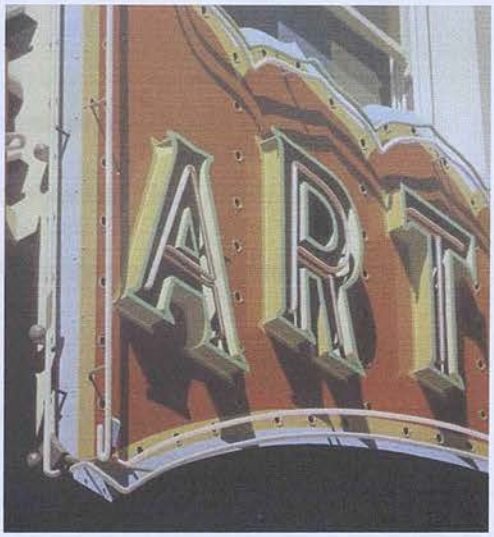
[37] **American Visions**, Hughes, 1997, p. 525.

Wood's American Gothic 1930) by the juxtaposition of strategic text. A similar textual tactic can be seen in a number of Photorealist paintings, most noticably those of Robert Cottingham (b. 1935) (fig. 12).




**American Madonna # 1**
Allan D'Arcangelo 1962
**Fig. 11**

As Raymond implies, the Photorealist canvas seems to embody a Pop triumph of visuality, yet its mechanical coollness (trumping that of even Andy Warhol) contradicts this hedonistic visuality. Photorealism did find favour even with a lay audience, but this audience did not, for they were not invited to extract any socially committed critique from the works. The works did seem to be devoid of that 'spirit' which would engage the viewer and encourage reflection and empathy. Yet, by virtue of being so rooted to the proximate world of subjects, the Photorealist canvas carries a surprising critique of contemporary being, which I will address directly in Chapter 4 ('The (F)act of Beholding: Traumatic Ontology').




**Art**
Robert Cottingham 1971
**Fig. 12**

'Reality', of course, is a problematical concept. The Photorealist painting is obviously a transformed version of whatever the chosen subject matter from the 'real

world', the everyday world as I term it, happens to be - no matter how closely the artist adheres to the visual information 'given' to him by the photo-source. The photo-source is the device used by the Photorealists to 'accommodate the subject matter to the flat canvas' (a device which is a subtle and complex transformation of the real in its own right as Chapter 3 will explore). I deal, in part, with this problematic of the real by referencing a Platonic postulate, not to present any resolution, but to structure the discussion which broaches issues of ontology. This structure is particularly relevant in Chapter 5 where I use an Existentialist ontology to analyse the manner in which the Photorealist 'painted transformations' are 'beheld'. The idea of a Platonic form, a form, that is, which exists independently of any simulation of it, can help to frame some of the discussion of the referents which appear through replication in the paintings. The art critic and philosopher, Arthur Danto best summarizes this Platonic premise, and extends Nochlin's observations on Realist painting to boot:

> *Mimetic art...stands at a certain invidious remove from reality, by which Plato meant primarily the reality of what he termed* ***forms****. Only forms are ultimately real, since impervious to alteration:* ***things*** *may come and go, but the forms these things exemplify do not come or go - they gain and lose exemplifications, to be sure, but they themselves exist independently of these.*[38]

I do not presume this postulate to be necessarily accurate: it is, for the purposes of this study, an expedient framework, and in later sections of Chapter 3, I consider an update, with reference to Barthes's semiotics of the photographic image, that imagines the

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[38]**The Transfiguration of the Commonplace**, Arthur Danto, Boston: Harvard University Press, 1981, p. 11.

disappearance of the form which exists untouched by representation, if indeed it was present at all.

One strategy with regard to this problematic was to take as case-studies works of art which deal with aspects of the 'problematic of the real' in varying ways: works of art which take as their subject, to reference Ralph Goings again, the plastic representation of things from the real world "as objectively as possible with believable authenticity." In other words, I want to juxtapose Photorealist works against other images and objects which comprise particular strands of Realism. Photorealist paintings (and Hyperrealist sculptures) connect in a number of ways with the lineage of Realism in the visual arts, and this correspondence will be explored with reference to a range of examples. Nochlin tells us that Realism as a movement in the history of art, was dominant from 1840-1880, and I do want to consider some Photorealist works against some paintings from this period to analyse similarities and differences between the methods employed to apprehend the subject matter of the real world. In this time-frame, the movement was concerned with, in Nochlin's words: "the truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life."[39] This concern of 'Old European' Realism informs my analysis of the Photorealist and Hyperrealist works, for these works *attempt* 'an impartial and objective representation of the real world'. It is this 'impossible realist goal' that I am interested in.

*Attempt* is an important qualification here. Obviously no artist can fully meet this Realist manifesto, yet (and here I want to make another obvious but crucial point) some artists produce works which *are closer* to this manifesto than others. Some artists arrange their 'semiotic material' to better achieve what Barthes terms the "reality effect." For me,

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[39]Ibid., 1981, p.13.

the paintings of the Photorealists and the sculptures of the Hyperrealists represent some of the most thorough and intriguing attempts by artists to 'meet' this impossible realist goal. The guiding question, therefore, towards the main objective of this exploration of the nature and structure of the realism of Photo and Hyper-realism could read: "what might it *mean* for the viewer to behold the end result of a meticulous attempt at a 'truthful', 'objective' and 'impartial' representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life?" Hence my title: "what is being said, and what might be said, about the being of the viewer when faced with the beguiling replication of the everyday facts of the context of their being?" It is this latter question that I have in mind throughout the study, and the dramatisation of ensuing heuristic possibilities, calling on Photorealist and Hyperrealist images and objects, and other realist images and objects.

Since the painter, sculptor or photographer cannot transparently capture the real, intrigue is added to this study; the artists knew that their plastic end result would betray its status as a copy to the viewer in intermittent flashes from the midst of the overwhelming illusion. They created an art which pulls in and out of its own reality effect, at once concealing *and* revealing the gap between referent and copy, between sign and signified, and, ultimately, between the beholder and the representation. This paradox, born from the simultaneous qualities within Photorealism of 'perfect simulation' and 'distinct copy', forms the crux of the proceeding analysis. For what might be said about a work which sets out to achieve that which cannot be achieved, for a work which *seems* to be transparently analogous to the everday world of the beholder, and yet which, through its visible, plastic artistry, remains clearly distinct through being clearly mediated? It is that gap between the meticulous copy, the 'perfect' simulation and the *distinctly* copied contemporary everyday that I want to explore. The cool illusionism of the works needs to be activated. The ultimate

concern of this dissertation is an undertaking to *re-enchant* the *hyper-illusionistic art object* - that object or image which is the end result of the knowingly forlorn attempt by the artist to apprehend the quotidian with analagous transparency. In Chapter 5 ('The (F)act of Beholding: Traumatic Ontology') I develop further the melancholic aspect generated by the attempt at analagous transparency, and propose that the ineluctable gap between the 'photo-real' and the 'everyday world-real' establishes many important heuristic possibilities within the Photorealist image.

In short, every Photorealist painting is a representation. All art is representation - at least, with certainty, all painting is representation (even if all painting is not art). But Photorealist painting, and especially Hyperrealist sculpture (which, perhaps unfortunately for the purposes of this aspect of the investigation, is not my focus) is strangely, and uniquely linked to the everyday world of real things because of its highly-illusionistic resemblance to the people and things from that everyday world. As noted, this high-illusionism can allow the viewer to be tricked into regarding the representation *as* real. The complexity of the Photorealist image is doubled when the viewer considers (with the 'objectness' of art propounded by the Minimalists as a prompt) the plastic 'realness' of the canvas itself, irrespective of what is depicted thereon.

The photographic source has a crucial role in establishing the Photorealist representation as momentarily real in the eyes of the beholder, and it is to the connotations of the photographic representation to which I turn now. The power of the photographic genesis and 'look' of Photorealism, and all that that can effect, is tremendously important to this study, as 5.2 explores; for now, the development of the ontology of Photorealist facticity starts with a closer look at the photographic source of the paintings and the

perceived connections between the photographic representation and the signified 'real' which appears, magically, in its chemical compounds.

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So, in Chapter 3 (''Mere Visual Facts': The Realist Verity of the Photo-Source'), I begin the analysis of the structures of facticity within Photorealist painting by examining the relationship between the photo-source and 'its' real world subjects and the ways in which the photographic image, with all its assigned values of truth and objectivity, is built on by the Photorealist painter in the construction of his beguiling representation of reality.

## Chapter 3 'MERE VISUAL FACTS': THE REALIST VERITY OF THE PHOTOGRAPHIC SOURCE

### 3.1 Simulation - Perfectly Attempted

In 1984 the critic Philippe Dubois suggested that photography highlights "the impossiblity of having the real coincide with its representation",[40] *even if* the realm of the real can somehow be discerned before the arrival of representation. Post-Baudrillard visual cultural analysis abounds with commentaries about the demise of the empirically real. In this subsection I will look primarily at the semiotic model of the referent and copy: a quotation from Vilem Flusser (1920-1991) might serve by way of introduction to exemplify the apocalyptic visions which destabilize the status of the 'real': "To be in the photographic universe means to experience, to know and to evaluate the world as a function of photographs."[41]

Take Duane Hanson's Young Shopper 1973 (fig. 13). Hanson's work embodies a very interesting *attempt* at the perfect analagon, or the perfect simulation, because he uses his models directly in the making of the work. By taking casts in latex directly from the bodies of the models, Hanson's finished sculptures have a physical relationship with their referents. In other words, to borrow from the sign theory of Charles Sanders Peirce, the

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[40]Philippe Dubois, quoted in, **Postmodernism - Philosophy and the Arts**, Hugh Silverman (ed.), London: Routledge, 1990, p. 156.

[41]**Towards a Philosophy of Photography**, Vilem Flusser, London: Reaktion Books, 2000, first published 1983, p. 70. However, resisting the extreme Postmodernist perspective which might proclaim the disappearance of the real,[1] both the *real* and the *representation* have their own facticity, two of the four aforementioned components of facticity within the works.

sculptures of Duane Hanson are "indexes"; works which have a direct physical connection to their objects.[42] To make a mundane but important point; Duane Hanson's shopper is not the shopper Duane Hanson's shopper is representing - hence its qualification as a representation! Ben Shonzeit's donuts (fig. 6) are, of course, made of paint (as the second condition of facticity acknowledges). The fibreglass and resin shopper, and the oil paint donuts, remain forever distinct from their referents. In this Chapter, I will examine the structures of the facticity of the photo-source, to explain the limits of the correspondence between sign and referent, between the object in everyday world and the intriguing copy. The photograph, of course, has a central role to play in the '*perfect attempt*' at simulation. So, before moving into the structures of the painted images via Louis Meisel's understanding of Photorealism, I will elaborate further on the *structure of the gap* between (everyday world) referent and (photographic) representation, with reference to some theories of the copy by way of Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and Martin Jay.

**Young Shopper**
Duane Hanson 1973
**Fig. 13**

Barthes himself denies the possibility of a perfect 'match' between referent and copy, but considers the *closeness* of the 'real' and its 'photographic simulation'. In 1978, he wrote:

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[42] A more 'dramatic' version of the artwork as index is, of course, Mark Quinn's self-portrait head, made from his own blood. The work replicates his likeness, cast in an indexical mould, and goes further because the substance of the work is actually something of Quinn himself. Artworks as indexes appear frequently as parodies of the artworks as indexes generated by the Modernist cult of the 'touch of the artist'. Manzoni's 'eggs' and 'balloons', and Duchamp's 'sperm' count amongst the most salient examples.

> *From the object to its image there is of course a reduction - in proportion, perspective, colour - but at no time is this reduction a transformation. In order to move from the reality to its photograph it is in no way necessary to divide up this reality into units and to constitute these units as signs, substantially different from the object they communicate.*[43]

This theoretical *closeness of real and referent* is a propitious concept to employ in attempting to explain something of the *effect* of the Photorealist work on the viewer 'at' the fourth level of facticity - 'The (F)act of Beholding'. First, we must consider the interesting relationship photography has with the everyday world, and the challenges set to the viewer once that relationship enters the Photorealist equation. To speak about the nature and significance of the facticity of the photographic representation, and, in turn, the painted representation of that photographic representation, I need to theorize about the fabric of these representations on a number of levels.

The painted representation may never become indistinguishable from the photographic representation, and the photographic representation may never become indistinguishable from the everyday world referent, but the *attempt* of certain Photorealists to replicate the photographic source-image informs my reading of their work. The attempt inherent in the trompe l'oeil painting effects a *reduction* of the 'space' between the work and its referent. We should also consider the significance of the construction of the Photorealist works and the photographed components of Pop. Photorealist subjects are

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[43] *The Photographic Message*, in **Image-Music-Text**, Roland Barthes, trans. Stephen Heath, New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.

related to the iconography of Pop art[44]. There is significance within both sets of works beyond the merely stylistic and there is significance in addition to the politics of consumption which accompany the best of Pop art production (see 4.3 'The Cultural Moment'). The Photorealist reduces the theoretical space between the referent and its replication and the Pop artist reduces the space between 'art and life'.

The first kind of significance comes as a result of the manner in which the Photorealist painting is constructed. A typical response to the works on this count was delivered by the American art critic, J. Patrice Marandel. He denies the Photorealist is addressing the question of the problematical concept of reality directly, instead he believes that the works of the Photorealists can only speak in a Pop-style, second-hand way about questions of epistemology. Writing in 1971, Marandel claimed:

> *The reason that painting today cannot be the pursuit of a real image has something to do with the quality of the artist's experience of reality. From an informational point of view painted images have too much to compete with: photographs, movies - not to speak of other ways to measure real phenomena - give a quicker and more straightforward answer to information questions.*[45]

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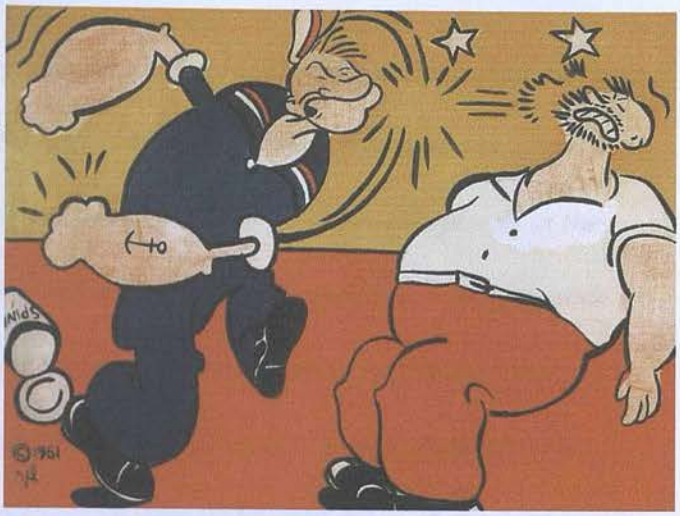
[44]The lineage of the popular culture components of Photorealism does not begin and end with the contemporaneous Pop imagery of that time, for, as Marco Livingstone writes: "the basing of images on existing popular sources had precedents in the work of nineteenth-century painters such as Gustave Courbet and Edouard Manet, showing early evidence for the move from nature to culture - from romanticism to realism, from an overt subjectivity to an ostensible objectivity - was most radically effected in the twentieth-century by Pop.(**Pop Art: A Continuing History**, Marco Livingstone, London: Thames and Hudson, 1990, p. 9.)

[45]J. Patrice Marandel, *The Deductive Image,* in **Super Realism**, Battcock, 1975, p. 48. This implicit understanding of a realist image being one which contains innumerable, unadulterated pieces of 'visual information' is commonly found in writings on Photorealism; see for example **Sharp Focus Realism**, Sydney Janis, exh. cat., New York: Sydney Janis Gallery, 1972, wherein the Photorealist canvas is regarded as a carrier of unadulterated pieces of information - able to compete with the photograph because of the painter's ability to ensure that *all* objects in the Photorealist scene are in sharp focus; a feature which the photograph cannot achieve.

This exemplifies the 'relegation' of Photorealism as a fatalistic body of work which accepts that the world is understood through endless repetition and simulation. Marandel's opinion is a value judgment which sees such a resignation in the face of efficient 'information media', if indeed that were the case, as, at best, fatalistic, at worst, a sub-standard artistic practice.



**Popeye**
Roy Lichtenstein 1961
**Fig. 14**

In this reading, Photorealism, is less a contribution to epistemological questions than a form of art which melds into the superior but still 'intolerable' Pop art. We encounter here the conservative standpoint of a commentator such as Clement Greenberg who did not tolerate the populist intentions of Pop art. For Greenberg the 'illustrativeness' of Pop art was a direct challenge to Abstract Expressionism and the success of this challenge did not mask the fact that Pop was essentially superficial. Roy Lichtenstein's (b. 1923) Popeye 1961, for example, doubles this illustrativeness, for the artist has illustrated a popular cartoon illustration, striking a blow against Expressionist 'Blutos'. (Lichtenstein's style of painting also relates to the 'dot matrix' construction of, especially, Close's Photorealism.) Greenberg believed that critical opinion at the time was mesmorized by the novelty of Pop, and that art critics "somehow always fall for the speciously new - the superficially surprising, the ultimately familiar and easy. And Pop Art, the welcome given to Pop Art in the early sixties was an example of that."[46]

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[46]Clement Greenberg from *The Bennington Seminars 1970*, in **Homemade Esthetics: Observations on Art and Taste**, Clement Greenberg, intr. Charles Harrison, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 184.

Arthur Danto explains further Greenberg's distaste for Pop art by stressing Greenberg's insistence on the primacy of flatness in a 'historical change' for painting:

> *It is in no sense to Greenberg's discredit that he did not see Pop art as marking a major historical change. 'So far,' Greenberg wrote, 'it amounts to a new episode in the history of taste, but not to an authentically new episode in the evolution of contemporary art.' What Greenberg regarded as 'a new episode in that evolution' was the work in his show of post-painterly abstractionism, probably because it thematized the flatness of which he made so much and, since staining rather than brushing became its favored mode of 'post-painterly' laying of paint onto surfaces, supported his theory that the brushstroke needed to be eliminated to keep painting 'pure'.*[47]

The structure of the Photorealist image involves an expression of what Greenberg termed "a new episode in the history of taste", but integral to the paintings resembling, to a degree, the photographic source, the Photorealist painter plays down the visibility of the brushmark in order to achieve a high degree of flatness in the final image. The final image, by virtue of this 'change of taste' and by virtue of its 'disguised' construction is able, in the

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[47] **After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History**, Arthur C. Danto, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 104.

manner of Warhol's Brillo Boxes (fig. 15) to close down the perceptible gap between object in the (Pop- contemporary) everyday world and copy. The conflation of a Pop change of taste and a Post-Painterly, or Minimalist form of construction, builds a structure into the Photorealist image which might begin to mean something in terms of how the world of popular culture was perceived in 70s America, and indeed, how the now contemporary world is *structured* through its predominantly visual reception.

### 3.2 Epistemology of Visuality

To address the 'structures of perception' is to address the significance of the Photorealist works on an epistemological level. Photorealist works embody what might be provisionally classed as, a Modernist 'theatrical agency' and a Postmodern 'static superficiality',[48] thus reflecting in a novel way the visuality of the Pop culture of America.


**Brillo Box (Soap Pads)**
Andy Warhol 1964
**Fig. 15**

Perhaps Harold Rosenberg was right, writing in 1972, when he claimed that "illusionistic art appeals to what the public knows not about art but about things."[49] Put

[48] Again, I have no intention of breaking off from the main investigation of the Photrealist levels of facticity and their attendant meanings and invokations, to become immersed in the colossal literature on Postmodernism. My advice is, then, that the reader allows such Modern/Postmodern phrases to roam at the back of the mind whilst reading some of the passages of seeming contradiction herein. For frequently I put forward the Photorealist image as an embodiment of a Jameson-style "depthlessness", while continuing to support the idea that the Photorealist painting can also allow deep, poetic and genuine ontological issues to inhere.

[49] Harold Rosenberg, *Reality Again*, in **Super Realism: A Critical Anthology**, Battcock, 1975, p. 138.

another way, the illusionism of the photographic image reinforces our twentieth-century 'epistemology of visuality'. The latter is founded on the notion that the everyday world appears to our *sight*, above all else, and remains 'unknown' until caught within our field of vision - whether actual or *in the mind's eye*.

As Philippe Dubois observed, we do not mistake the photograph for the real thing, but perhaps in witnessing the photograph we do reassert to ourselves, as beholders, the dominance of visuality, and hence the vulnerability in representation of a visually constructed world.[50] And this visual construction can involve the operation of replications which can conceal, for a moment at least, their status as replications; this facilitates, to a degree, the glide between the real and the simulation and the unconcsciousness of this movement in Postmodern epistemology. This privileging of vision has been analysed by Martin Jay. In a 1988 essay he writes:

> *Whether we focus on "the mirror of nature" metaphor in philosophy with Richard Rorty or emphasize the prevalence of surveillance with Michel Foucault or bemoan the society of the spectacle with Guy Debord, we confront again the ubiquity of vision as the master sense of the modern era.*[51]

The photographic illusionism of Photorealism appeals then to what the viewer[52] knows about things - or rather, what the viewer knows about *how he knows* about things. It may

[50] It is not unusual for the Photorealist painting to be mistaken for a photograph - it *can* be mistaken for the 'real thing' in other words. The Hyperrealist sculpture of Hanson is often mistaken for the real thing, a phenomenon I have witnessed at first hand via a version of his Tourists 1970, in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

[51] Martin Jay, *Scopic Regimes of Modernity*, in **Vision and Visuality**, Hal Foster (ed.), Seattle: Dia Art Foundation, 1988, pp.3-25.

[52] This terminology presents a rather "Lockean" take on the viewer as individual, disallowing the possibility, the inevitability, of private languages. This 'misconception' is useful for the sake of argument, for a comparison is made between the 'beholder' of the Photorealist work and the 'beholder' of the Minimalist work in Chapter 4, with reference to Michael Fried's concept of "theatricality" which also plays to an 'essentialist-individual' reception of the works in question. For a counter to this misconception see for example Alain Touraine's analysis *The Subject as Social Movement*

well be the case that the viewer of Photorealism in the new millenium is more ready to accept the given epistemology as his own, now that the everyday world appears to him more and more through photo-replicated means. The everyday world more than ever, then, appears as a 'confused and global experience'.[53] And this is the point which Marandel makes scathingly.

The culprit *par excellence* in this scenario was, of course, identified as television. The instrument has been, in part, culpable in the creation of a sedentary populace: a body of people which obtains the everyday world through a global system of imagery, uncritically, and whilst stationary. In the words of Paul Valery (1871-1945), writing in 1965:

> *Just as water, gas and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual or auditory images, which will appear and disappear at a simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign.*[54]

The replications to be seen through televisual means are for Jean Baudrillard proofs of the condition wherin the "real becomes that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction."[55] In a way, this condition, or symptom of an epistemological visuality, is the case with the Photorealist work. Or at least the artists are conscious that their mundane subjects are somehow rendered noticeable, or *seen*, through the process of replication. This allows for a positivist reading of the Photorealist practice, in contradistinction to the

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in **Critique of Modernity**, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, pp. 233-254. In this analysis Touraine makes the counter position clear when he writes: "When I speak of the Subject, or in other words of the construction of the individual as actor, it is impossible to divorce the individual from his or her social situation." P. 234.

[53]This quotation from Gabriel Marcel prempts the discussion of Chapter 5, see p. 154.

[54]Paul Valery, **The Conquest of Ubiquity**, trans. Ralph Manheim, New York: Pantheon Books, 1964, p. 226.

[55]**Simulations**, Jean Baudrillard, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983, p.146.

suggestions of Marandel and others. The craft of the Photorealist (and even the repetitious craft to be seen in Warhol's screenprints for example (see fig. 18) affords the images a constructive purpose on an epistemological level.

**Pee Wee's Diner Still Life**
Ralph Goings 1977
**Fig. 16**

The *over seen* objects in Ralph Goings's Pee Wee's Diner Still Life 1977 (fig.16), for example, become 'visible' through his replication of their appearance. Perhaps a 'homage' to the quotidian: perhaps a contemporary 'vanitas'. Whichever reading is taken, what is clear is that Goings avoids the loading of the image through interpretation, claiming in 1973 that he tries to perceive visual "splendor as objectively as possible and render it with believable authenticity."[56] The evenness of the paint surface testifies to the fact that the artist has not entered into a *transformation* of the scene. Nor has he entered into a 'transmogrification' of the paint - a similar anti-expressionist restraint to that celebrated by Greenberg in the work of the Post-Painterly abstractionists. The quotidian scene created by Goings does not appear to be re-ordered and presented as an interpretation to the viewer - the viewer is made to see it 'as a given'. This apparent quality of mere *given-ness* is connoted by the photographic image at the heart of the fabrication of the Photorealist painting.

With an image 'not doctored' (for it adheres to the facticity of the data held in the photo-source), 'nor mediated' (for the paint is applied in a manner which 'conceals' its application), Goings explores the limits of what Norman Bryson calls an 'encoding'. Encoding as Bryson posits,[57] can be seen in such painting as Thomas Anshutz's

[56]Ralph Goings in an interview with Louis K. Meisel, 1973 in **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 275.

[57]See **Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze**, Norman Bryson, London: MacMillan Press, 1983, esp. Chapter 1,

Ironworkers' Noontime Rest 1880 (fig. 17) wherein some of the constituent parts are staged to put forward an illusion of reality (3D modelling, texture differential etc.) and others are put forward to construct an allegory of industrialization and proletarian America. In our post-Derridan climate, all visual information is a metaphor of a kind - if indeed any credible distinction can be made between literal and metaphorical meaning.[58] A painting can never be *just* a replication of a scene from the everyday world. The cultural theorist, Chris Jenks summarizes this post-Derridan position:

**Ironworkers' Noontime Rest**
Thomas Anshutz 1880
**Fig. 17**

> *Our concepts, in each and every case, have a metaphoric relation with the 'real' continuous world, the relationship is never direct. Even though the empiricist demands of modern culture insist that we should impartially witness and report on the external in a correspondential manner our concepts are always metaphoric - nothing more, but certainly nothing less. They 'stand for' a state of affairs, they do not assume the status of literal descriptions.*[59]

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(*The Natural Attitude*) and Chapter 2, (*The Essential Copy*).

[58]The work of Derrida and deconstructionism has problematized the distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning, at times suggesting that all meaning is in some way metaphorical. See **The Margins of Philosophy**, Jacques Derrida, trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

[59]Chris Jenks, *The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture,* in **Visual Culture,** Chris Jenks (ed.), London: Routledge, 1998 (first published 1995), p. 14.

In Pee Wee's Diner Still Life (fig. 16) Goings does seem to attempt a 'literal description', as if to find a way to speak about the *over seen* without the obfuscation of metaphor and analogy. These characteristics, or perhaps 'the distinct lack of these characteristics', forms the basis of the 'perfect attempt' at simulation and is indebted to the special qualities of the photograph.

**210 Coca-Cola Bottles**
Andy Warhol 1962
**Fig. 18**

Warhol's use of similarly *over seen* pop culture icons underlines Goings's painting as one of (a perfect attempt at) literal simulation. Coke Bottles 1962 (fig. 18) engages with a similar theme of rendering the overseen *visible*, but Warhol seems to move beyond this objective by rendering the 'newly' seen 'invisible' through the process of multiplication.

No doubt certain photographers at the turn of the 20thC century regarded their business as a serious contribution to knowledge and truth. An anecdote used by Ian Jeffrey makes this point. Jeffrey notes that the photographer Frank Eugene (b.1865) "captioned one of his portraits of Steiglitz, 'Photographer and Truthseeker'."[60] This historical, mythical property of the photograph is knowingly played to by the Photorealists: the old myth contributes to a first glance reading of the pictured quotidianity as being 'verity'. It assists the objective summarized by Goings, "to achieve (visual) splendor as objectively as possible and render it with believable authenticity." That the digital imaging process can ease the act of doctoring prevents it, according to the theorising in this Chapter, from

[60] **Photography: A Concise History**, Ian Jeffrey, London: Thames and Hudson, 1996, first published 1981, p. 96.

providing a 'perfect attempt' at simulation, for the 'perfect analogon' discovers its visual power when it is recognised as being an *attempt* at simulation.[61] The concept of the 'analogon' is put forward by Roland Barthes in his 1978 essay, *The Photographic Message*.[62] For Barthes, with the analogon, "there is no necessity to set up a relay, that is to say a code, between the object and its image."[63] He elaborates on the *analogous* copy:

> *Certainly the image is not the reality but at least it is its perfect analogon and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph.*[64]

In our society founded on a visual epistemology, a society which Jenks, following Foucault,[65] believes is founded on the production and 'orchestration' of the visual, (whether digital or chemically photographic):

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[61] My intention is to use the term 'simulation' with Baudrillard's theories in mind, but I think it is useful to highlight Rex Butler's concerns about the misuse of this term from Baudrillard's writings.I have endeavoured to avoid the trap which Butler believes has caught both Robert Hughes and Christopher Norris. "When Baudrillard's commentators speak of simulation, they often mean simply a form of illusion, the replacement of the world with its image, so that we do not experience things originally but only as a copy of something else. It is to make of Baudrillard's work a description of the 'take-over' of reality by the sign, like some science-fiction scenario. (This is the way the Australian expatriate art critic Robert Hughes understands Baudrillard in a review of *America* for *The New York Review of Books*.) Or, in an even more extreme version, simulation is seen as a form of philosophical idealism, in which the 'reality' of everyday events is completely denied. (This is the way the British deconstructionist Christopher Norris understands Baudrillard in his dispute with him over the Gulf War.) In fact, **what must be grasped first of all about simulation is that it is not only the loss of reality, but also its very possibility. The aim of simulation is not to do away with reality, but on the contrary to realize it, make it real.**"(Rex Butler, **Jean Baudrillard:The Defence of the Real**, London: Sage Publications, 1999, p.23.) Here then, the visibility of the artifice of the Photorealist canvas and the Hyperrealist sculpture finds theoretical support; for the epistemological significance and the ontological interest stems from the attempt at simulation never achieving absolute status - the strategy is 'perfect' because it respects the epistemology presented by the photograph, but the outcome can never be the consummatory disappearance of the real into the realm of the representation.

[62] *The Photographic Message* in **Image-Music-Text**, trans. Stephen Heath, New York: Hill and Wang, 1978, reprinted in **A Roland Barthes Reader**, Susan Sontag (ed.), London Vintage, 1993, first published 1982, pp. 194-211.

[63] Ibid. 1993, p. 196.

[64] Ibid., 1993, p. 196.

[65] Foucault considers the 'visual instruments of power' explicitly in his writings on Bentham's Panopticon, a system of incarceration which played on the inmates tendency to discipline themselves having resigned themselves to the fact that they were under constant surveillance. This model gives rise to the idea that any body wishing to control its 'inmates' or its 'populous' must ensure that these inmates are perpetually visible. See **Discipline and Punish**, Michel Foucault, trans. A. Sheridan, New York: Pantheon, 1977, first published 1976.

> *Modern power is pervasive, though not omnipotent, because it cautiously acts on and in relation to the scopic regime. The 'gaze' and the conscious manipulation of images are the dual instruments in the exercise and function of modern systems of power and social control.*[66]

Clearly such speculation invites further reference to Baudrillard's theories of the 'pornography of the visual',[67] and such like, and these will be introduced as the hermeneutics unfold. For the time being, one more reference from Baudrillard demonstrates his similar fascination with illusionistic painting as analogous to a contemporary epistemological visuality: "Trompe-l'oeil is the ecstasy of the real object in its immanent form."[68]

Of course, Baudrillard would hesitate to make any distinction between the real and the copy, despite the obvious 'fabrication' of Hanson's Young Shopper and Schonzeit's Donuts, for examples, claiming instead that:

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[66]**Visual Culture**, Jenks, 1995, p. 15.

[67]See *The Ecstasy of Communication* in **Fatal Strategies**, Jean Baudrillard, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

[68]Jean Baudrillard, *Objects, Images, and the Possibilities of Aesthetic Illusion*, in **Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact**, Nicholas Zurbrugg (ed.), London: Sage Publications, 1997, pp. 7 - 18. I have to be careful to not reinvent a social and cultural context for Photorealism which it did not 'enjoy' when it first 'arrived'. However, there is no doubt in my mind that the recent commercial and 'reputation' successes of Chuck Close and Richard Estes are in part explained by the greater willingness to accept the 'unmediated image', or the 'superficially visual'. This thesis will not be attempting Baudrillard-style hyperbolic speculation, but the prophetic aspects of Photorealism are being registered by critics and historians now, moreso than when the works were first exhibited in the seventies. Pretentiously, much of Photorealism could be classed as Proto-Postmodern with reference to Baudrillard's theories of the Postmodern ecstasy of communication and replication. Perhaps there was saturation of Pop iconography in the wake of the endeavours of the Pop giants of the sixties.

> *...our whole life has taken on a video dimension. We might believe that we exist in the original, but today this original has become an exception for the happy few. Our own reality doesn't exist any more.* [69]

Baudrillard's polemical utterances about the absence of reality and the indistinguishability of the copy[70] are concerned with a shift of understanding also pointed to by notions of 'epistemological visuality'. Duane Hanson sculpture Young Shopper (fig. 13) is clearly (empirically) not really a shopper, but the omnipresence of replication in our culture renders that salient fact somehow redundant.

Inured to myriad replications we cultivate a different, and no doubt, superficial epistemology. Baudrillard comments on the inability of the receivers of culture[71] to fully comprehend the implications of the copy. He suggests that 'copies' and 'replications' lurk, somehow unchallenged (but not, I must say, within Photorealist works or critical Pop works) in all aspects of visual culture, breeding and fostering the condition of Hyperreality. Baudrillard accepts the empirical existence of the replica, at the same time as he charts the syndrome of the replica unrecognised in culture at large.

It is pertinent then to reconsider Photorealism as a body of work which can help to unlock and illuminate some Postmodern theories of knowledge which were being developed at the same time. This body of art work can assist in its particular way in identifying and interrogating the aspects of copy in culture and deserves to be given a

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[69] Baudrillard quoted in **Art and Artefact**, Zurbrugg, 1997, p. 19.

[70] See for example Christopher Norris's harangue, *Lost in the Funhouse: Baudrillard and the Politics of Postmodernism* in **What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and The Ends of Philosophy**, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990, pp. 164-194. An excerpt from this essay reads: "Baudrillard is undoubtedly the one who has gone furthest toward renouncing enlightenment reason and all its works, from the Kantian liberal agenda to Marxism, Frankfurt Critical Theory, the structuralists' 'sciences of man', and even - on his view - the residual theoreticist delusions of a thinker like Foucault."

[71] The receivers of 1970s American culture and 'us'; for one need not enter into a paranoid tirade against global homogenization to realise that the superabundance of imagery plundered by the Pop artists and the Phototrealists has come to be an accepted fact of even British cultural life at the turn of the millenium.

primary role in the discussion of 'the all too visible' and the 'hyperreal'. Concomitantly, Postmodern theories can help us to see and know Photorealism in more complex and rewarding ways, and, interestingly, these Postmodern theories can be turned towards themselves, in a way, with theories of Modernist art in assistance. If, for example, Michael Fried's concept of theatricality is successfully applied to a hermeneutics of Photorealism, whereby the Photorealist work rebounds the viewer's gaze through its 'colossal', Postmodern visual literalness - then perhaps, the viewer is called to reflect upon his own presence in the face of such 'objecthoodness'. If, then, the reflected gaze through objecthoodness can be construed as a moral potentiality, then maybe my hermeneutics of Photorealism connects with some of the calls from critics of Postmodernism, such as Christopher Norris, who insist that the viewer has a moral obligation not to fall into the snare which hides in the obfuscation of Postmodern, superficial visuality. When Norris writes: "any politics which goes along with the current postmodernist drift will end up by effectively endorsing and promoting the work of ideological mystification"[72] he is implicitly recommending that 'the viewer', or the social agent, does not become awash on the sea of relentless and valueless signing. The way off such a Baudrillardian sea of signification, is to revisit the image, ready to *see* beyond the superficiality to *know* something of whatever may lie behind the sheen of sheer literalnesss. Behind the sheen lies the encoded photographic image.

[72] *Baudrillard and the Politics of Postmodernism* in **What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy,** Norris, 1990, p. 191.

### 3.3 Photographs as Indexical Evidence

Now I will look more closely at the structures of the photographic image used as source in Photorealist painting, using Roland Barthes's (1978) theories of the *Photographic Message*.[73] For the Photorealists the photo-source acts as a kind of 'verity checkpoint'; it is the intermediary catalyst, the filter between the everyday world and the act of the fabrication of the everyday world. For the viewer, the photograph, because of its 'meticulously recorded visual data', facilitates the mapping together of the sign and signified. The signified has two components within the Photorealist equation - first is the photo-source, second is the subject matter depicted therein. Clearly, with such high illusionism, the finished painting can be taken to be highly similar to both the photo-source and the subject matter depicted. This twofold signification persists, despite the frequent 'drawing together' of the Photorealist painting and the idiosyncracies of the photo-source. Edward Lucie-Smith comments on this with reference to the work of Chuck Close: "Close also tries to echo the camera's faults as well as its virtues. He seems anxious to reproduce the aberrations of vision that are peculair to the camera's lens."[74]

If the data, or facticity, contained within the photo-source is transposed meticulously: the photo-source *designates* what will appear in the finished painting. Its data is 'ready-made', prepared to be transferred to the painted canvas and the process of construction ensures certain aspects of the aesthetic of the photo-source is preserved. As Lisa Phillips, Director of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, pointed out,

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[73] *The Photographic Message*, in **Image-Music-Text**, Barthes, 1978.

[74] **Art Today**, Ewdward Lucie-Smith, London: Thames and Hudson, 1997, p.463

Photorealism was a "style of painting, based on photographs, that simulated photography's shiny, cold surfaces."[75]

**Rita the Waitress**
Duane Hanson 1971
**Fig. 19**

This 'look' of the photograph, which is in some way preserved in the Photorealist canvas, logically, informs the potential meaning of the finished paintings. The relationship between the photographic image and everyday world determines the meaning of the 'style' of the photographic image. The photographic image *corresponds* with the 'real world', our everyday world, in some way. The semiotic terminology of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) is useful in elaborating on the ways in which the photograph corresponds with the objects in the lifeworld which appear in its frame.

Photographs are *indexical*, to use Peirce's terminology. With reference to his "three trichotomies of signs",[76] the photograph can be deemed indexical because it is a sign which denotes an object by being affected by that object. Examples of indexical representations, or indexical signs, are, for example, footprints and death-masks, and Hyperrealist sculptures. Such Hyperrealist works as Duane Hanson's Rita the Waitress 1971 (fig. 19) are literally/physically 'taken', indexically, from the physical entities of the models being represented. In this case "Rita" acted, literally, as Hanson's model. The photograph on this page demonstrates the indexical method used by George Segal (b. 1924) in making this

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[75] **The American Century**, Lisa Phillips, exh. cat., New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2000, p. 274.

[76] See **Peirce on Signs: Writing on Semiotics by Charles Sanders Peirce**, James Hope (ed.), Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991. Especially the 1955 essay, *Logic as Semiotic: the theory of signs*.

kind of Hyperrealist sculpture (fig. 20). The art lies in the physical impression of the model somehow remaining throughout the process of constructing the work, to 'inhabit' the finished sculpture. With the photographic process, light conjoins the object/subject matter and the photographic film, maintaining an analogous degree of indexical connection.[77] This indexical relationship means that the photograph frequently mystifies. This property of 'mystification' is founded on the notion that an indexical representation is somehow 'more objective' than representations which are non-indexical. Or, put another way, representation through 'designation' is more objective ultimately than representation through 'mediation'. The English cultural theorists, Tony Schirato and Susan Yell describe this quality of the indexical photographic image:

**George Segal's 'Indexical' Moulding Technique 1983**
Photographs by Michael Abramson
**Fig. 20**

> *The first thing we can say about a number of contemporary visual mediums - photographs or film, for instance - is that they have gained a high level of credibility as means of communication precisely because they seem to be able to reproduce reality in an apparently objective way. Visual texts do not appear to be mediated: there appears to be no obvious difference between the image the text provides and the 'reality' it stands for.*[78]

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[77]The work of the en plein air artist does not have the same indexical relationship with his subject matter, for although light acts to 'fix' the witnessed scene on the retina of the artist, the transference of that fixing to the canvas involves processes of further and further physical remove from the scene portrayed thus cancelling the indexical link. And it is this indexical link which legitimizes Segal's work being considered Hyperrealist, even though he does not produce the same level of illusionistic finish as those Hyperrealist sculptors, like Hanson and de Andrea, who use latex and polyester resin.

[78]**Communication and Culture**, Tony Schirato and Susan Yell, London: Sage Publications, 2000, p. 166.

Photographs and films, then, 'appeal' to us as carriers of indexical evidence of the everyday world. What we know of the everyday world empirically, we can 'see again' in the photograph or the film. This appeal is registered by Barthes as the defining characteristic of the photographic image; "in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*...and since this constraint exists only for photography, we must consider it, by reduction, as the very essence of photography."[79] As the rider points out, this indexical relationship is never pure - the object which affects the photographic paper, does not transfer *itself* to the photographic paper, and the whole process can, of course, be exploited to mediate the affect of the object in the everyday world. The American photography critic, Andy Grundberg makes this point clear in a 1998 essay:

> *At least since Cindy Sherman's Untitled Film Stills series of the late 1970s (and let us also remember Andy Warhol's silkscreen Disaster Paintings of 1963-64), critics and artists have focused on photography as a mediating agent within contemporary life. Pictures, especially camera pictures, are seen to stand in the way of our experience of the 'real thing' - or, worst-case scenario, to obliterate and thus obviate the very notion of the real.*[80]

Grundberg does not dismiss the (albeit impure) indexical quality of the photographic image; he goes on to reference recent work in photography which has returned to exploiting this particular aspect:

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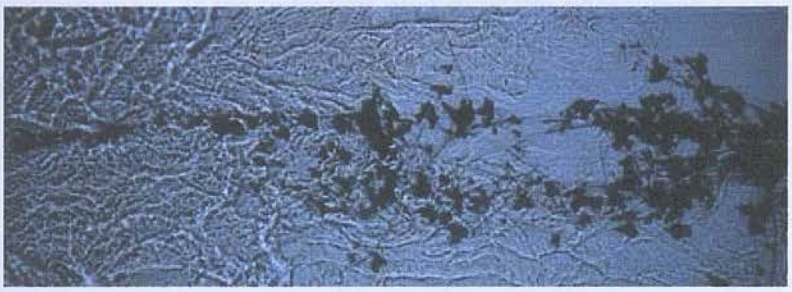
[79] **Camera Lucida**, Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard, London: Fontana, 1984, first published 1980, p. 76.

[80] Andy Grundberg, *J. John Priola: The Photograph as Index*, in **Crisis of the Real: Writings on Photography Since 1974**, 1999, p. 259.

*In the late 1980s, English artists Susan Derges and Adam Fuss, among others, began returning photography to its primitive, camera-less state as a means of teasing out its representational authenticity devoid of cultural interpolation. Their photograms are essentially records of the presence of objects made directly by the action of light on sensitized paper - as unmediated as photography can get.*[81]

Derges's 1980s series of the River Taw (fig. 21) comprised a number of 'photograms' wherein she exposed photographic paper to the play of reflected moonlight from the surface of the river. The result, theoretically, is the direct indexical play between object in the everyday world and photo-sensitive paper.



**River Taw Series**
Susan Derges 1983
**Fig. 21**

Indeed, the indexical aspect of the photograph can have such appeal to encourage us to believe the everyday world to be, without doubt, as it appears within the photograph's frame. Susan Sontag opens this possibility in her text, ***On Photography***:

*In teaching us a new visual code, photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have the right to observe. They are a grammar and even more importantly, an ethics of seeing.*[82]

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[81] Ibid., 1999, p. 259-260.

[82] **On Photography**, Susan Sontag, New York: Anchor Books, 1990, p.3, first published 1977. I am conscious that this

There seems to be then a symbiotic relationship between the photograph and its referent: the everyday world is notionally evidenced in the photograph and the film; and the photograph and film inform us as to *how* to look and *what* to look at. In proto-Baudrillardian fashion, Sontag, suggests, for example, that "travel becomes a strategy for accumulating photographs."[83] (Consumerist) experience of the world becomes more of a search for that which will look right in photographic form - thus the effects of the photograph and film become pernicious rather than affirmative of a widening empirical 'discovery'. This syndrome is, of course, not confined to recent influences of photography. It is a direct effect of the seductiveness of the indexical quality of the photographic image and has a history as long as that of the photographic process. Paul Valery noted the seductive 'indexical-effect' of photography on even the apprehension of historical knowledge:

> *The mere notion of photography, when we introduce it into our meditation on the genesis of historical knowledge and its true value, suggests this simple question: Could such and such a fact, as it is narrated, have been photographed?*[84]

This introduces the contradictory nature of the application of photography and film. Both are frequently used as if they were documentary manner and yet both provide ample opportunity to present a highly mediated version of the real world. Because photography

thesis does not really address directly this discourse of 'the ethics of seeing'. This topic is met when I discuss the the ways in which the photographically generated image is representative of en Existential world-view in Chapter 4. So, the 'whether we should see what the camera and film proposes we should see' resides in an ethical territory which is not covered. For more on this ethics of seeing, see Schirato and Yell, pp. 166-184; and especially, **The Burden of Representation**, John Tagg, London: MacMillan, 1993, chapters 3,4 and 6 in particular, first published 1988.

[83] **On Photography**, Sontag, 1990, p. 9.

[84] *The Centenary of Photography*, Paul Valery, 1939, reprinted in **Classic Essays on Photography**, Alan Trachtenberg (ed.), New Haven: Leete's Island Books, 1980, pp. 191-199.

appeals to our need for verity, through its apparent objectivity, it is the perfect vehicle for the carrying of visual untruths and subjective mediations of events in the lifeworld. Postmodern paranoids discuss at length the implications on humankind of a world which appears to us through mediation, reconstructed by the invidious characters of the media.[85]

Granted, the photograph can deceive, and present the lifeworld not as the lifeworld appears in *fact* but there is this incontestable, indexical quality to the photograph. Referencing the phraseology used by Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, John Tagg sums up this point:

> *Beyond any encoding of the photograph, there is an existential connection between 'the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens' and the photographic image: 'every photograph is somehow co-natural with its referent'. What the photograph asserts is the overwhelming truth that 'the thing has been there'.*[86]

The Photorealists' use of the photographic image 'ensures' that the relationship between the finished painting and the subject matter is to a degree co-natural. Their starting point is the ideology that the photograph is a perfect, disinterested arbiter between the real and the representation of the real. By using this medium, the Photorealists appeared to 1970's eyes

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[85] It is impossible for me to ignore the ideological spaces in which photography finds itself enmeshed. As said, the photograph and film are at once the heroes of cataloguing and 'knowing' the world, *and the villains* for masking the depths of the real world, through endless superficial replication. The sceptical have photography marked as a prime suspect in the rendering of the world *seeable* but not *knowable*. Here I want to direct the reader to an eminently sensible discussion of the role of the media in the construction and reconstruction of the lifeworld, which understands the media to recount the real world in the same way as humans do in their oral explanations of phenomena and events. In which case the "media, in general, do not set out deliberately to deceive anyone, to manipulate or to abuse their audiences." The truth of the matter is that "News in a newspaper or on a television has a relationship with the 'real world', not only in content but in form; that is, in the way the world is incorporated into unquestionable and unnoticed conventions of narration, and then transfigured, no longer for discussion, but as a premise of any convention at all." (**Communicating Unreality**, Gabriel Weimann, London: Sage Publications, 2000, p. 5ff.)

[86] **The Burden of Representation**, John Tagg, London: Macmillan, 1993, first published 1988, p. 1.

to preserve the sense of the 'thing having been there', significant in this study for the existential implications of this on the beholder (see subsection 'Entity and Ground', Chapter 5).

David Phillips in a 1998 essay[87] suggests that to emphasize the indexical quality of the photograph by playing on the mystery of the 'thing having been there' is to (continue to) privilege logocentric interpretation of the visuality of photography. With reference to Jacques Derrida's concept of "phonocentric necessity"[88] - the privileging of speech over writing, Phillips writes:

> *Much of Derrida's account of the privileging of speech (due to its assumed proximity and authenticity to thought) is pertinent to photography in that it too is frequently posited as the site of an unmediated self-presence identical with the real and accessible through a transparent medium.*[89]

This problematizing of the indexical status of photography introduces what I will call *oscillation* to indicate the unreliable indexical aspect of the photographic image. Oscillation becomes a fundamental tool in my interpretation of Photorealist painting (see subsection 'Implosion of the Paradoxical Analagon', Chapter 5). Phillips cites Rosalind Coward and John Ellis who write;

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[87] *Photo-Logos: Photography and Deconstruction* in **The Subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspective**, Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 155-180.

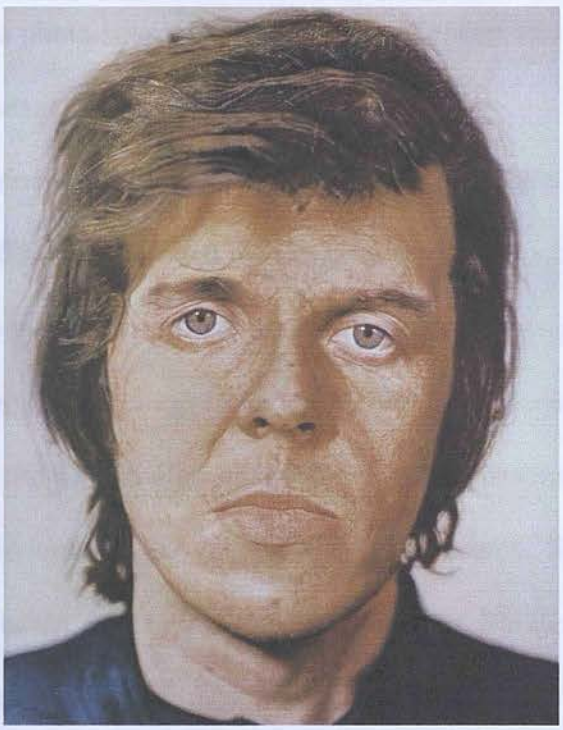
[88] Phillips refers to Derrida's discussion of the 'unmediated plenitude of speech' in **Of Grammatology**, Jacques Derrida, trans. Gayatri Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 20ff.

[89] Ibid., p. 159.

> *Realism has as its basic philosophy of language not a production (signification being the production of a signified through the action of the signifying chain) but an identity; the signifier is treated as identical to a (pre-existent) signified. The signifier and signified are not seen as caught up together in a process of production, they are treated as equivalents: the signifier is merely the equivalent of its pre-established concept.*[90]

Phillips regards this seeing of the photograph as an 'overly' logocentric indexical equivalent - destined to produce a linear stasis around the photographic image, rather than allow the image to have the quality of a Derridean *trace*.

By arguing for the photograph to be seen as a trace rather than an index, linked to a pre-existent given, Phillips calls upon Derrida's explanation of différance. "The trace is not a presence but the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates itself, displaces itself, refers itself, it properly has no site."[91] A Photorealist painting, such as Chuck Close's Kent 1970-71 (fig. 22), in being constructed from the indexical photo-source, draws attention to the



**Kent**
Chuck Close 1970-71
**Fig. 22**

[90]Rosalind Coward and John Ellis quoted in, *Photo-Logos: Photography and Deconstruction* in, **The Subjects of Art History**, Cheetham, Holly and Moxey (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 164.

[91]See *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science*, in **Writing and Difference**, Jacques Derrida, trans. Alan Bass, London: Routledge, 1997, first published, 1978.

structure of that photo-source, and in so doing, draws the photo-source slightly away from the 'pre-existent' given. In other words, the indexical, linear link the photo-source has with the 'pre-existent given' is 'deprivileged' by the painting's 'insistence'on *its* connection to the photo-source. What is more, the photo-source in the Photorealist artistic equation redoubles photography's play with the 'powerful absence of the pre-existent given', the 'lingering sense of the thing having been there', by being itself conspicuous through its absence. The finished painting relies so heavily on the intermediary photo-source that the finished painting can be easily mistaken *for* that photo-source: especially when the Photorealist painting is 'easel sized' and exhibited behind glass, see for example John Salt's Ironmongers 1981, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh. This fact of resemblance exaggerates the presence of the photo-source through its absence, and allows for the type of oscillation which Phillips moots.

As will be introduced below, with reference to the Realist structures in Courbet's La Source 1868 (fig.73 Chapter 5) the subtle differences between the image as 'equivalent' and the image as 'trace', characterize the differences between an 'encoded', painted Realism and Photorealist Realism. Courbet's painting, I suggest, presents an 'equivalent', visually linked to the pre-existent given,[92] whereas the Photorealist image enters into a produced relationship with the pre-existent given because of the role of the photo-source. The photograph can have a 'produced' relationship with a pre-existent given as Barthes's theories of the photograph can be made to show.

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[92]Of course Courbet's painting is also visually linked to the pre-existent givens within the history of images as much as it is linked to any pre-existent given by way of the everyday world studio model. James Rubin notes this inevitable twofold aspect of (Courbet's) painted realism: "In The Source Courbet reinvested the conventions of the nude with the authenticity of his inimitable, sensuous Realism." (**Courbet**, James H. Rubin, London: Phaidon, 1997, p. 212.) This idea is developed with reference to Barthes's concept of 'syntax'.

### 3.4 Denotation (designation) / Connotation (mediation)

In 1978, the height of the Photorealist decade, Barthes asked, what does the photograph transmit? His answer: the photograph transmits two types of message, the denoted message and the connoted message. In this case he was analyzing the news or press photograph. The latter's source of emission "is the staff of the newspaper, the group of technicians certain of whom take the photo, some of whom choose, compose, and treat it, while others, finally, give it a title, a caption, and a commentary."[93] The photo-source of Close's paintings is not 'tinkered with' in this way; so, as Barthes might have suggested, that it appears more 'objective' than the press photograph. In Barthes's terminology, Close's photo-source is an *analogon*, that is, a direct, 'unadulterated' image. As has been discussed an *analogon*, is an image which has a seemingly direct and indexical relationship with the 'pre-given' signified from the everyday world. It is an image of 'only' denotation: it is a "continuous message."[94] While there is a reduction in size and scale and a change of material, from photographic paper to canvas, with an analogon "there is no necessity to set up a relay, that is to say a code, between the object and its image."[95] This analogon, then, is the image which shuts down the space between the object of representation and the representation of that object.

This conception of analogon, this perfectly corresponding image, in as far as it can be achieved through the plastic arts, is involved in the tension between 'Realism' as a moral imperative and *trompe l'oeil* as a source of fascinated pleasure. Something of this tension is

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[93] **Camera Lucida**, Barthes, 1984, p. 76.

[94] *The Photographic Message*, in **Image-Music-Text**, Barthes, 1978.

[95] **Camera Lucida**, Barthes, 1984, p.196.

exemplified in the Classical legend of the competition between Parrhasios and Zeuxis. Here a curtain painted by Parrhasios in exact correspondence with the everyday world curtain, 'tricked' Zeuxis into attempting to pull it back to reveal the real painting underneath exemplifies the exact correspondence of an analogon.[96] Such an image is therefore the epitome of mimesis - its status as representation is enhanced by its perfect correspondence with that which it represents.

**Belair**
Robert Bechtle 1973
**Fig. 23**

Norman Bryson discusses this type of image in 1983.[97] Bryson points out that such an analagon is an impossibility for its producer cannot succeed in removing it from its specific cultural/historical context: "The doctrine of technical progress towards an Essential Copy proposes that at a utopian extreme the image will transcend the limitations imposed by history, and will reproduce in perfect form the reality of the natural world: history is the condition from which it seeks to escape."[98] Perhaps the American Dream imagery of Robert Bechtle presents an attempt to 'transcend the limitations proposed by history', claiming instead that 'apprehended moment' in Belair 1973 (fig. 23) to be a universal 'natural truth' of the American condition. Or, more likely, Bechtle suggests to the viewer that the

[96]Barthes discusses the analagon with reference to photography, but the concept of the sign meeting its 'signed' in perfect correspondence is a model applicable to other media. Once again it is a theoretical model, and the perfect analagon is not 'plastically' possible, but the condition of the illusionistic simulation is undeniable and the fact of its resemblance to its source ensures that the concept of the perfect copy, and the gap between the lifeworld referent and any copy yet produced in the plastic arts remain central theoretical components of the Photorealist equation.

[97]*The Essential Copy* in **Vision and Painting: The Logic of the Gaze**, Bryson, 1983, pp. 13-37.

[98]Ibid., 1983, p. 13.

imagined universal truth ought to be questioned because of the very fact that the 'truth' has been proposed by the always-duplicitous analogon.

The analogon, Barthes explains, as a result of its 'objectivity', or the "plenitude of its analogy"[99], is an image of pure *denotation*. The photograph took over as the means by which pure denotation was possible. The endeavours of Zeuxis and Parrhasios became outmoded when the artist decided his role was to seek to go beyond the confines of the surface appearance of the everyday - leaving inane mimesis to the machine. However, Barthes rightly states that such perfect analogousness is only mythical. The photographic analogon, including the press photograph, is still likely to be *connoted* to some degree.[100]

### 3.5 The Assigned Value of the Photograph

Barthes describes six tactics of connotation. The first three, "trick effects", "pose" and "objects" are alterations of the reality of the thing to be photographed or its setting. The latter three, "photogenia", "aestheticism" and "syntax" are set apart for they deal with the artistic, dark-room treatment of the print and the placing of the photograph in a particular medium (newspaper, magazine etc.).

At the same time as the Photorealists, scholars and critics turned their attention to the tension between the photograph as the perfect analagon and the photograph as a written image. For example, in 1988 Pierre Bourdieu accused institutional users of photography of trying to conceal its interested vision. Photography for Bourdieu has become embedded in an already aestheticized manner of seeing the world. This opinion undercuts Barthes's

[99] **A Roland Barthes Reader**, Sontag, 1993, p.196.

[100] Let alone the fact that a photograph of a man does in no way physically resemble a man, under normal circumstances.

suggestion that the perfect analogon corresponds only with the appearance of the natural world and not the appearance, the aesthetic appearance, of culturalized images.

With the fifth strategy of connotation, "aestheticism", Barthes considers that the photograph might allude to the picturing of painting (his example being the 'pictorialism' within photography at the beginning of the 20thC) but that this is second to the "generally more subtle and complex signified than would be possible with other connotation procedures."[101]

Painting by contrast, says Barthes, is imbued with a certain *being* by dint of the (unavoidable) expressiveness of the painter. 'Spirituality' in painting is not signified he argues, rather it is part of the very being of the image.[102] Photography on the other hand sets up an objective spectacle - a complex of connotations which refers to the objectiveness of the photographic image. For Bourdieu, writing in 1990, this complex of connotations is intertwined with a sociopolitical context. He wrote: "In fact photography captures an aspect of reality which is only ever the result of an arbitrary selection, and, consequently, of a transcription."[103] He goes on to state that the objectiveness read into the photograph is in part created by the social roles which photography has been afforded since its invention:

> *Photography is considered to be a perfectly realistic and objective recording of the visible world because (from its origin) it has been assigned social uses that are held to be realistic' and 'objective'.*[104]

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[101] **A Roland Barthes Reader**, Sontag, 1993, p. 203.

[102] This connects with Phillips discussion of *Photography and Deconstruction* once more. He reads conventional Realism, in painting for example, as having a "transcendental signified"; the representation retains a spiritual quality despite its 'likeness' to that which it represents.

[103] **Photography: A Middle-Brow Art**, Pierre Bourdieu, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, p. 75.

[104] **Photography:A Middle-Brow Art,** Bourdieu, 1993, p.75.

Barthes of course understood all along that the perfect analogon is mythical. This underscores the simple observation that the Photorealist painting is not that which it depicts: but it does draw near to that which it depicts. Barthes says, then, that the perfect analogon may indeed be an ideal but this fact should not prevent analysis of the attempt of the photograph to become this mythical analogon. Indeed Barthes speculates that the earliest endeavour of the photographer was to produce a perfect copy of natural appearances (no doubt en route to mastering the new technique) with the final result being regarded as as an almost magical version of the referent.

Ian Jeffrey, writing in 1981, begins his history of photography with the function of the photograph as a magical analogon of nature:

> *This was reflected in names and terms coined to describe the new process. Camera images were called 'sun pictures' and said to be 'impressed by nature's hand'. Whereas earlier pictures were made or willed into existence, photographs were 'obtained' or 'taken', like natural specimens found in the wild.*[105]

Jeffrey's discussion goes on to include W.H. Fox Talbot's 1844 illustrated book, The Pencil of Nature. This book included a range of street scenes and still life photographs which in sum stood for the ability of photography to produce the perfect analogon. As Jeffrey points out, early photographers such as Fox Talbot saw nature as the active operator in the photographic equation - not the photographer. Nature drew herself into the photographic apparatus.[106]

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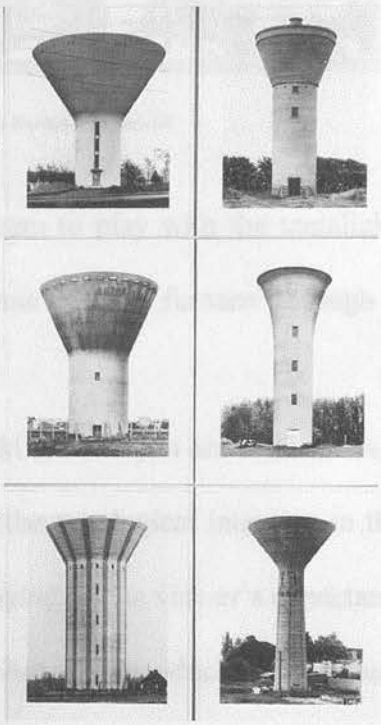
[105] **Photography**, Jeffrey, 1996, p. 10.

[106] See especially *Seeing Nature: Discoveries by Fox Talbot and Hippolyte Bayard*, in **Photography**, Jeffrey, 1996, pp.

The project of Fox Talbot in 1844 was carried forward and expanded upon in many photographic programmes of the second half of the 20thC, when photography was established as central to avant-garde and alternative practices. As Jonathan Fineberg wrote:

> *In much of the art of the late sixties and early seventies - particularly in conceptual art, performance, temporary installations, and works in remote settings - photography offered the only vehicle for a wider dissemination of the idea.*[107]

The important documentary role played by photography in the 1970s generated a wider interest in the inherent properties of the photographic image.



**Watertowers (Detail)**
Bernd and Hilla Becher 1980
**Fig. 24**

Bernd (b. 1931) and Hilla Becher (b. 1935), for example, are photographers who have explored the limits of the reputed ability of the camera to allow nature to transcribe herself onto photographic paper. Their series photographs of the seventies and eighties, for example, Watertowers 1980 (fig. 24 detail), quiz the possibility of the photograph as analogon. Although some critics regard the Bechers' work as an example of the objective quality of photography (chosen as a political move against the subjective tendencies in Modernist expressionist painting),[108] the Bechers' series photographs also expose the inability of the camera to

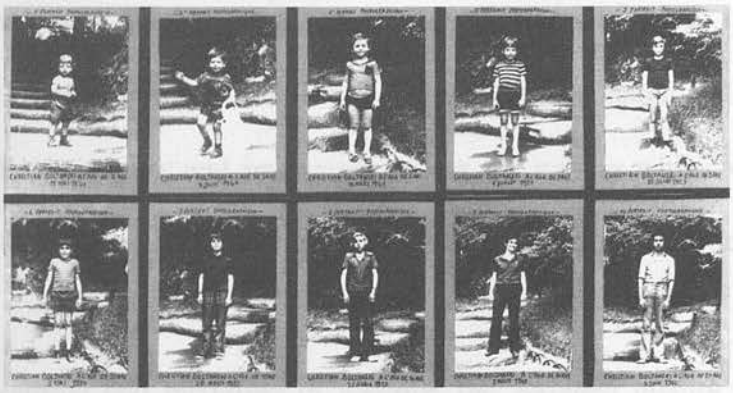
10-28. Also, *Documentation: Objects and Events 1839-1890*, in **A World History of Photography**, Naomi Rosenblum, New York: Abbeville Press, 1997, pp. 154-208, first published 1984.

[107] **Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being,** Fineberg, 2000, p. 384.

[108] Cf. **Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being**, Fineberg, 2000, p. 342, and **After Modern Art**, Hopkins, 2000, p. 181.

produce an 'essential copy', or perhaps an 'eidetic essence' from what can be classed as a phenomenological typology.

These works seem to propose that an ideal form might be achieved (it is forlornly proposed) if the artist discriminately sifts through those versions of the form obtainable on earth. The Bechers' work sets out to dispassionately record all examples of mine winches in just such a phenomenological investigation - but the photographs do not present the final form, the absolute form - no 'predicate' of furnace head is reached. The Bechers seem to play with the tantalizing possibility of the artist (anyone) achieving the eidetic absolute of 'blast furnace' through an appratus of indexical means.[109]



**10 Photographic Portraits of Christian Boltanski 1946-64**
Christian Boltanski 1972
**Fig. 25**

A similar theme was broached by Christian Boltanski (b. 1944) in his 1972 series of self-portrait photographs (fig. 25). Boltanski affects a similar typological intention to that of the Bechers, except he catalogues himself as subject. Playing on the viewer's expectancy of verity from the photograph, Boltanski presents portrait photographs which are obviously not portraits of the artist. Toying with this expectancy, Boltanski draws attention to our latent tendency to trust the photograph as truth. In addition he casts doubt on the

[109]The Bechers applied their 'typological' approach to various types of architecture. "Bernd and Hilla Becher used a formal taxonomic method to order typologies of vernacular architecture in Framework Houses - Wiesenstrasse 35, Siegen 1970." (See Russel Roberts, **In Visible Light: Photography and Classification in Art, Science and The Everyday**, exh. cat., Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1997, p. 45.)

objectiveness of the typological project in general - defying himself to produce the pure form, or predicate, which is 'Boltanski'.

The series of self-portrait photographs taken by Cindy Sherman (b.1954) tackle more explicitly the danger in presenting a body of work which is easily *typed* by the viewer. In her now famous Film Stills, a series which began with the Untitled Film Stills in the 1970s, Sherman presented herself in a number of different guises in order to evade the stereotyping gaze of the (male) viewer. Boltanski and Sherman explore the potential of the medium of photography to make comments and judgements about the way in which we approach and approximate the pure form of self and identity through notionally indexical means.

With regard to the discerning and recording of identity, the assigned quality of indexical denotation has seen photography become the tool of the 'overseer's' recording, cataloguing and classifying. In this way it performs an 'empowered' designation. It denotes the civilian's identity, unmediated, with 'no' connotation. The police photograph, the passport photograph, the identification badge, and so on, continue the myth of the photograph as the perfect analogon. Bourdieu believes this to be a pernicious practice precisely because the photograph conceals its simulation. Once again, the impossibility of the complete concealing of the simulation means that the photograph leaks its artifice - it reveals its status as an *attempt*. Photorealism too can be seen as responding to this idea. An

image such as Chuck Close's pastel version of Mark 1977 (fig. 26) seems to reveal the inner workings of the photographic image, to indicate that the sitter (the citizen?) is in part known and constructed through the pixellated data of the photographic image.

**Mark/Pastel**
Chuck Close 1977
**Fig. 26**

Rex Butler recently cited the discussion between Socrates and Cratylus, taken from The Dialogues of Plato, vol.II, in which Cratylus states that a perfect copy, or an analogon of himself, in terms of the discussion above, would not constitute a copy any longer. Cratylus and an analogon of Cratylus would comprise two Cratyluses. Butler writes, by way of explanation of the comment made by Cratylus:

> *Plato's point here is that when two things resemble each other too closely they no longer resemble each other at all. There is no longer a relationship of original to copy, but of two separate originals. The copy only resembles the original in so far as it is different from it.*[110]

Susan Sontag, in 1973, put forward a polemic position with regard to the Socrates - Cratylus dialogue. Sontag argumentatively maintained that the profusion of photographic images in then contemporary society causes a terminal blurring of the difference between

[110]Rex Butler, *Jean Baudriallard's Defence of the Real,* in **Jean Baudrillard: Art and Artefact**, Nicholas Zurbrugg, London: Sage, 1997, p. 51.

original and copy. In Sontag's vision, the analogon has potent social effect as it disperses centres of origin. Usefully for this discussion she refers to the Platonic world-view which posits clear difference between the terrestrial and the world of objectivity, as discussed above, and claims that photographic images have been instrumental in the concealing of the world of the original.

> *The powers of photography have in effect de-Platonized our understanding of reality, making it less and less plausible to reflect upon our experience according to the distinction between images and things, between copies and originals.*[111]

As early as 1973 Sontag posited a clearly Postmodern point of view here, suggesting that analogons have come to be mistaken for originals. In a sense, she saw her contemporary society as a domain in which the copy of Cratylus had come to roam: analogons and originals have become indiscernable - the analogon has become a thing in its own right.

Later (in 1983), developing notions of the freeplay of the 'copy', Jean Baudrillard presented in his writing the most infamous version of this complex of image and copy. He agrees wholeheartedly with Sontag's view and classes the syndrome of the indiscernableness of the original and the analogon as *Hyperreality*.[112]

The hyperreal is dependent on the potency of the *trompe l'oeil* characteristic of the analogon. For the analogon in Baudrillard's scenario of the Hyperreal has the potential to be

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[111] **On Photography**, Sontag, 1990, p. 179.

[112] See *The Ecstasy of Communication* in **Fatal Strategies**, Jean Baudrillard, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983, reprinted in **Postmodern Culture,** Hal Foster (ed.), Washington: Bay Press, 1983. Baudrillard's theories of simulation are extremely relevant to this thesis. The 'counterfeit', the production of the industrial era and the simulated 'code' will all be referenced. The political ramifications of his theories of simulation will not be of the same concern, although notions of the 'reproduced' self will be mentioned with reference again to Bourdieu and Burgin.

infinitely reproduced. This progression of infinite reproductions results in the utter negation of the original - as the reproduction proceeds into interminable re-productions, the origin is abandoned, and crucially is unable to be recovered. Ultimately, then, in the process, the origin disappears leaving only a sea of floating copies - each as original and unoriginal as all others.[113]

In his 1985 analysis of Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes 1964 (fig. 15), Arthur Danto effectively classed them as examples of Hyperreality. The 'art-objects' vie with their original and end up emulating that original to the extent that the 'two' become indistinguishable. Danto sees this as the culmination of the tendency in Modernist artistic production to re-produce the appearance of the everyday world. But Baudrillard sees a difference between the attempts at re-production by Renaissance artists and the re-productions of twentieth-century artists. He classes the end result of the Renaissance artist's attempt at producing the exact equivalent of nature as *counterfeit*. The difference between the thing chosen from the world of appearances and its copy is that the copy declares itself as such.

The *attempt* of the photograph to conceal its difference makes credible the perfect analogon as a discursive model and this model will be used to unravel aspects of Close's photo-portraits in the following subsections . The use of the photo-source creates a copy which is very similar in appearance to the original and yet the final image oscillates between copy and original - the resemblance is made salient through difference, to borrow

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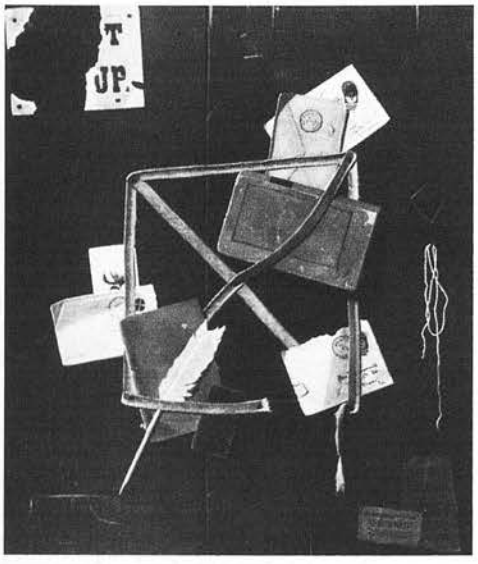
[113]The Postmodern condition of Hyperreality is now well established in Postmodern literature and is frequently cited in the painting of the Postmodern doomsday scenario. For a detailed discussion of the cause and effects, including political effects, see Deborah Cook, *Symbolic Exchange in Hyperreality*, in **Baudrillard A Critical Reader,** Douglas Kellner (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, p. 150-163. I don't wish to go over the ground of the Hyperreal, preferring instead to pursue, chiefly, the implications of the theory of the Counterfeit put forward by Baudrillard.

from Butler and to reference Phillips. At the heart of the photograph, then, there is an oscillation, an integral paradox.




**Old Scraps**
John Peto 1894
**Fig. 27**

### 3.6 The Photographic Paradox

The Photographic Paradox for Barthes results from the coexistence of the analagousness of the photograph and its connotative message. The photograph as analogue is an image without a code. The art or the writing of the photograph is performed with one, or all six, of the above connotative elements, and this writing constitutes the message with a code - the connoted message. The photograph masquerades as an image without a code but reveals itself under analysis - including under painted analysis - as a connoted image.

As Gombrich discusses in *Art and Illusion*, Parrhasios's success came about through the expert trompe l'oeil rendering of the curtain, but also as a result of *expectancy*.[114] The trompe l'oeil painter relies on expectancy according to Gombrich, and this expectancy is played upon by the manipulation of objects, to refer to the tactics of connotation listed by Barthes in his theory of the Photographic Message.

To borrow Gombrich's example, Old Scraps 1894 (fig. 27) by the American painter John Peto (1854-1907), who, alongwith William Harnett, forefigured the high illusionism

[114] **Art and Illusion**, Ernst Gombrich, London: Phaidon 1987, first published 1960, p. 173.

of Photorealist painting, we see that the artist has set up expectancy by painting the letter rack so as to bolster the illusionism of the painted letters. As Gombrich noted:

> *The trompe l'oeil painters have relied on the mutual reinforcement of illusion and expectation: the painted fly on the panel,* [and with reference to Old Scraps] *the painted letters on the letter rack.*[115]

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In the next chapter I will anlayse the phenomenological materiality of the works themselves, their inherent structures, in order to evince something of the ultimate essence of the facticity of the works.

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[115] **Art and Illusion**, Ernst Gombrich, Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1960, p. 173.

# Chapter 4 PHOTOREALIST 'THINGS': CONSTRUCTED QUOTIDIANITY

## 4.1 Meisel's Photorealism

In New York in the late 1960s and 1970s Louis K. Meisel set about showcasing the emerging Photorealist painting. In the words of the critic Gregory Battcock, writing in 1980, "no single individual was willing, capable, or adventurous enough to concentrate on developing the potential of the Photo-Realist mode. None, that is, until Louis Meisel opened his second gallery on Prince Street in Soho in 1973. Photo-Realism thus came of age and was assured the constant and thorough attention it had been waiting for."[116] Any inquiry into Photorealism, and Hyperrealism for that matter, must consider the definitions of Photorealism given by Louis K. Meisel: the movement's greatest champion.

In 1980 Meisel published ***Photorealism***, the product of ten years of research. The intention "was to illustrate every painting done by the Photo-Realists from 1967 - 1977, the first decade of the movement."[117] Meisel and his wife, Susan Pear Meisel had by 1980 established a "salon"[118] of Photorealism in the loft of his New York apartment - a venue for the collection and for the Photorealists in his survey to meet and discuss the works.

Gregory Battcock's publication of ***Super-Realism: A Critical Anthology*** in 1975 was important in advancing the critical analysis of the works. As noted, in the foreword to

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[116] **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p.8.
[117] ibid., 1980, p. 7.
[118] ibid., 1980, p.7.

the 1989 edition of Meisel's first catalogue raisonne, he acknowledges the paramount importance of Louis Meisel and Ivan Karp. "Within the scope of Modernist art, there has probably not been any single movement or style that has been so dependent upon the enthusiasm, administration, and support of two people - Meisel and Karp - as has been the contemporary Photo-Realist style. It is a chapter in the history of art without parallel."[119] Meisel's gallery was the epicentre of Photorealism - and his five point explanation of what constituted a Photorealist painting set the tone for much of the critical approach to the paintings.[120]

In full, his five point definition is:

1. *The Photo-Realist uses the camera and photograph to gather information.*
2. *The Photo-Realist uses a mechanical or semi-mechanical means to transfer the information to the canvas.*
3. *The Photo-Realist must have the technical ability to make the finished work appear photographic.*
4. *The artist must have exhibited work as a Photo-Realist by 1972 to be considered one of the central Photo-Realists.*
5. *The artist must have devoted at least five years to the development and exhibition of Photo-Realist work.*[121]

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[119] ibid., 1980, p.11.

[120] Meisel did not catalogue or collect Hyperrealist sculpture, but his interest in the 'appearance and method' of the Photorealists provided a high-profile precedent for the analysis of the sculptures. For example, the early work of George Segal, which is highly political, is often only approached from a formal/technical position - as if Photorealism/Hyperrealism only presents curious objects, replete with technical finesse, and devoid of any serious meaning.

[121] ibid., 1980, p. 13.

Meisel goes on to discuss in detail the rationale behind each criterion. Each rationale raises complex issues and concepts which speak of tremendous hermeneutic potential, but Meisel resists conceptual analysis: his crucial, first three criteria, set out purely technical grounds.[122]

The first three definitions from Meisel's list are most relevant to this analysis, for they are concerned with: a) the photograph as carrier of the visual data to be transposed into the final painting; b) the mechanistic process of transposing the photographic information to canvas; and c) the importance of the finished painting obtaining the look or aesthetic of a photograph. In this chapter I will consider both the structure of the 'things' themselves and the significance of the third layer of facticity, 'the quotidian subject matter', as the two components are intrinsically linked. The analysis will make use of Meisel's original definitions, expanding upon the issues he broached.

## 4.2 The Fabricated Moment

The first point raised, but not pursued, by Meisel concerns ***time***. Meisel's assessment is the starting point in setting up this 'hermeneutic possibility'.

With reference to the paintings of Richard Estes,[123] Meisel remarks on the *en plein air* difficulties faced by the Photorealist when taking his source photo:

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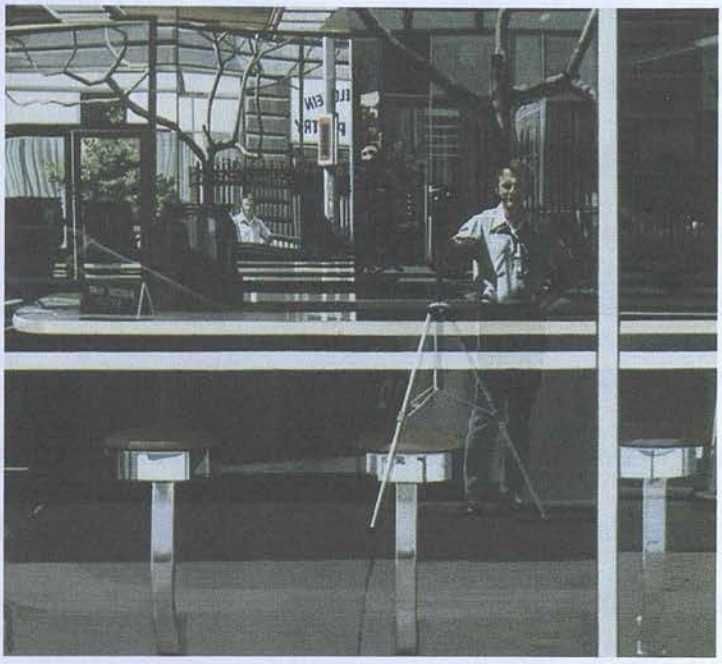
[122]It is certianly not my intention to attack Meisel for not extending his analysis of Photorealism in the way that I shall, and it is probably worth saying that Meisel himself admitted that the critical or theoretical analysis of Photorealism was carried out by others. In his preface to the complete paintings of Richard Estes, he cites Gregory Battcock and John Perreault as the important critical defenders of the movement. Nonetheless, the principal distinguishing factors of Photorealist paintings are set out in his five point definition and are thus useful in marking areas for further analysis. What is more, my 'theoretical discourse' around Photorealist painting often differs considerably from Battcock and Perreault.

[123]Richard Estes was born in 1936, Illinois. He studied at the Chicago Art Institute from 1952-56. He has had numerous solo shows of his paintings, mainly in New York, and mainly through the Alan Stone Gallery, New York. Estes's oeuvre presents something of a problem to anyone intending to address the 'deep implications' of Photorealist painting for he has frequently eschewed all attempts to theorize his paintings. Meisel noted Estes's reluctance to analyse his work in any

*As he sat there working, the traffic would move, the light would change; if the artist were to move a microfraction of an inch, all reflections would change radically...For the Photo-Realist, change and movement must be frozen to one second in time, which must be totally and accurately represented. Only a photo can do that.*[124]

Estes, takes to the streets of Manhattan very early on Sunday mornings, so that his *en plein air* research for his photo-sources can be undertaken with less interruption from traffic and people. His objective on these sorties is to 'apprehend' the street scene without distraction, and to this end the camera serves Estes well. Double Self Portrait 1976, (fig. 28) is a rare example of Estes including a figure in his painting, as well as being emblematic of the central importance of the photograph in allowing the artist to 'see the moment', in great detail, over the extended period required to complete the canvas.



**Double Self Portrait (Detail)**
Richard Estes 1976
**Fig. 28**

depth: "To Estes a painting is either good or bad; he either likes it or he doesn't, without concern for anything other than visual aesthetics. This attitude permeates his work, and he wants us to consider it by his standards. His painting should not be intellectualized, because that is not what Estes is about." (**Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 209.)

[124] ibid., 1980, p. 13.

Meisel describes here, knowingly, something of the predicament of the Impressionist working 'in the field' one hundred years previous and invites the contrast to be made between the implications of the Impressionist 'moment' and the Photorealist 'moment'. This artistic gambit might be seen more generically as the realist's concern with apprehending his contemporary world. Any picture which could convince the viewer that it was somehow inextricably linked, in a moment, with its 'real world referent' would go further to achieve the definitive Realist goal defined by Nochlin; 'the truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life'. Some points might also be made about the American 'contemporary moment' versus the 'fleeting contemporary' of an Impressionist painter[125] (see 4.3 'The Cultural Moment' below). Meisel is describing one motivation of the Photorealist as being the same as that of the Impressionist. He sees the reliance on the camera as the only possible 'solution' to the 'problem' of capturing fleeting reality. "Photo-Realist painting cannot exist without the photograph. If Richard Estes attempted to sit in front of a building and simply draw or paint what he saw, his work would look like any other academic realist work."[126]

By employing the camera to 'lay down' the blueprint from which a 'painting of that moment of the real' might be constructed, the Photorealist achieves an interesting twist on the Modernist project as described by Baudelaire, so central to Realist painters of the nineteenth-century, and alluded to by Meisel. Baudelaire famously wrote in 1863: "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other

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[125] Within the literature on Photorealist painting there are numerous comparisons to the Impressionist programme of rendering the fleeting. One such example is an essay which I cite frequently throughout: *Existentialist versus Humanist Realism*, Linda Chase, reprinted in, **Super-Realism: A Critical Anthology**, Battcock (ed.), 1975, pp. 81-96. The Photorealist Tom Blackwell also mentions the importance of the Impressionists' idea that the final image is somehow 'mixed in the viewer's eye': "Up close there is no illusion, just good solid painting. The illusion is actually 'put together' in the eyes of the viewer and this occurs at some distance from the canvas. That's another reason why scale is so important." (**Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 87.)

[126] **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 13.

half is the eternal and the immutable."[127] Meisel describes Estes's working method as one which is set on apprehending a moment of the real - using mechanical means. He points out the necessariness of the Photorealist having a "frozen" representation of that moment of the real in order that the final end result can be created in paint. The fleeting moment of the New York street, for example, is taken by way of the camera, and then rendered 'immutable' by the meticulous construction of the canvas. Double Self Portrait makes very clear the two components. Of course there are clear differences in meaning and effect between the Photorealist and Impressionist 'moments'. Linda Chase writes:

> *Although the nineteenth-century realists spoke of achieving a "styleless style," the paintings of Courbet, Monet, Manet and Degas are filled with personal stylization and references, conscious and unconscious, to the conventions of classical and romantic painting.*[128]

Estes 'captures'[129] the moment in his camera and then proceeds to make that particular moment appear somehow immutable and eternal - at least as immutable and eternal as oil paint on stretched canvas will allow. In this respect the Estes paintings confirm the point made by Battcock in the introduction to Meisel's ***Photorealism*** that: "The new Photorealism can be seen as an affirmation rather than a repudiation of mainstream Modernist art,"[130] in so far as, in this case, Estes's painting attempts that

[127]Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*, 1863, reprinted in, **Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology**, Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (eds.), London: Harper Row, 1982, pp. 23-27.

[128]Linda Chase, *Existentialist and Humanist Realismi,* in, **Super-Realism: A Critical Anthology**, Battcock, 1975, p. 87.

[129]I remind the reader of the caveat set out in the Preamble. 'Capturing', never being total, can only be an approximation of 'that moment of the real' - but the photomechanical process sits closer to the core of the Realist agenda outlined by Linda Nochlin than the Impressionist's picturing of the fleeting. What is more - whether or not the image successfully apprehends 'that instant of the real', the artist's project calls the abstract 'possibility' to mind. Like the photograph, the Photorealist painting speaks clearly about the 'attempt at the instant' - perhaps the 'myth of the instantaneously available' - the purely transparent.

[130]**Photorealism,** Meisel, 1980, p. 8.

Baudelairian-Modernist conceit of rendering a fugitive moment in time somehow immutable.

Taking a lead from Chase and Meisel, a brief look at a work by Degas might be useful in elaborating on the Baudelairian 'dual temporal aspect' of Modernist painting which can inform a reading of the photo-realism of the twentieth-century. Degas 'delighted' in producing oils and pastels which had the *appearance*[131] of being produced in a fleeting moment in front of the subject matter, Before The Exam c1880 (fig.29), for example. In discussing the temporal aspects of nineteenth-century Realism, Linda Nochlin comments on Degas's use of photography, and notes that he was:

**Before the Exam**
Degas c1880
**Fig. 29**

> *enthralled by the whole photographic process. Degas, more than any other realist, looked upon the photograph not merely as a means of documentation, but rather as an inspiration: it evoked the spirit of his own imagery of the spontaneous, the fragmentary and the immediate.*[132]

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[131] I stress 'appearance' for Degas's works are carefully constructed to give the impression that the finished image was performed in an instant similar to the one implied by the 'momentary' poses of his models. Having said this, that the oil or pastel or painting is necessarily a careful plastic-semiotic arrangement, there is no denying that the manner in which the camera re-presented the contemporary world preoccupied Degas - and in a very similar way to the Photorealists, especially Chuck Close, with regard to the way in which the lens focuses on its subjects. Daniel Catton Rich makes this point about Degas's interest in photo-technology: "The camera as a new medium for artistic purposes fascinated Degas. At first he had observed how a sensitive plate revealed the momentary aspect of a person. Now it presented new angles of vision, caught on an image and cut it. Focus was sharp here, blurred there. Degas became an ardent photographer himself, and at times he pushed the new viewpoint in painting so far that it seems to anticipate the candid camera and the motion picture." (**Degas**, Daniel Catton Rich, London: Thames and Hudson, 1985, p. 19.)

[132] **Realism**, Nochlin, 1971, p. 44.

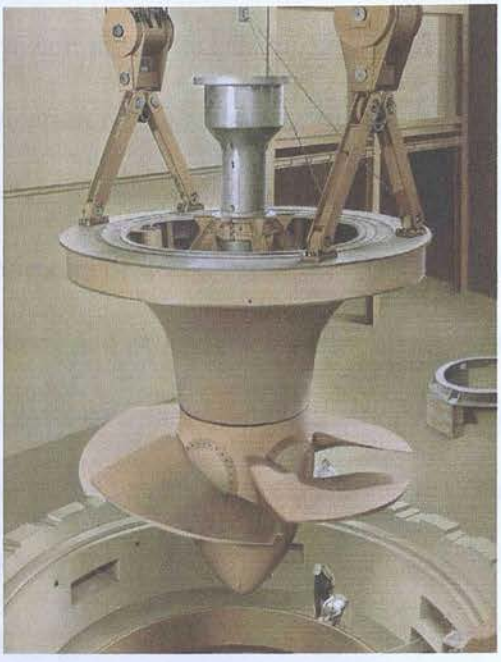
For Degas to produce contemporary realist works, he had to produce an image which appeared as if it were the product of a spontaneous act, as Nochlin notes, and the speed with which the camera can apprehend a scene was taken as inspiration (this despite there being no fast shutter speeds in Degas's day). In Before The Exam, Degas has arranged the scene pictured to give the impression to the viewer that the poses held by the protagonists were held only for a moment. Indeed, the title itself telescopes time into an instant 'before' the main action of the 'exam' takes place: he shows us, by way of these constructs, a privileged behind-the-scenes 'moment'. The composition is also informed by the capability of the camera view finder "which rests momentarily here or there, hunting out some particularly striking slice of life."[133] Perhaps such statements about Degas's compositioning now border on cliche, and no doubt the influence of Japanese prints played an important part in these particular compositional devices,[134] but the point still stands here that on occasion, Degas sought to create the 'appearance' of a photograph - to create the illusion that the final painting or pastel was created in an instant. This he did by making clear allusions to the aesthetic of photography, as he saw it, and has no doubt contributed certain stylistic strategies *to* the aesthetic of the photograph. In so doing, he typified the usage of photography by his generation of realists and he unwittingly preempted, to an extent, the third definitive qualification in Meisel's list: *The Photo-Realist must have the technical ability to make the finished work appear photographic.*

Estes's rendering of the fleeting immutable likewise places a premium on 'the photographic', and continues to involve the attempt to apprehend the contemporary moment, but he makes much more use of the photograph as a *document*, as a source of visual data. Of course there are no 'spontaneous', idiosyncratic marks of pastel, "personal

[133] **Degas**, Catton Rich, 1985, p. 19.

[134] See **Degas**, Catton Rich, 1985, pp. 17-20.

stylization" or passages of impasto, in Estes's cityscapes.[135] That level of engagement with the subject had long been replaced by what Meisel saw as the mechanical or semi-mechanical process of producing the genuinely Photorealist painting. In essence, Estes is attempting a similar allusion as Degas to the aesthetic of the photograph, so too had William Harnett (fig. 10) and John Peto (fig. 27). This interest in what was regarded as a 'photographic look' is seen markedly in the work of the American Precisionists who, in the 20s and 30s, according to Edward Lucie Smith, attempted to:



**Suspended Power**
Charles Sheeler 1939
**Fig. 30**

> *Reconcile three trends: the new Modernist spirit, which had originated in Europe and was now taking root in the United States; the influence of photography; and the ingrained American desire to confront reality directly.*[136]

Estes updates the reference to such Precisionists as Charles Sheeler (1883-1965) (fig. 30) and enhances this allusion by employing the mechanistic mark-making technique which serves to underline the mechanical way in which the camera serves up 'its' imagery. Degas, Peto and Harnett may have approximated a stereotype of the way the camera 'sees', Sheeler and Estes go on to mimic the mechanistic aspect of the photo-process. Ironically, to

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[135] As Estes was to do one hundred years later, Degas was keen to "capture the new urban reality" (**Realism**, Nochlin, 1971, p. 158) of his time.

[136] **American Realism**, Edward Lucie Smith, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, p. 73.

achieve this allusion to the mechanism of the camera in the way that he does, Estes needed to spend a considerable amount of time in his studio, after the initial photographs of the subject have been taken - often up to four months to complete one canvas.

The 'capturing' of the fleeting (or the fabrication of a plastic conceit which implies this), is, in a way, still part of the 1970s Photo-realists' ambition, but the *time* of production and realisation is very much extended beyond the 'moment' to be captured. This *extension* of the moment through the 'working-up' of the visual end product creates an idiosyncratic paradox. The paradox is generated by the played-down interpretive engagement on the part of the Photorealist painter during the extended time of the working up. Conservative critics of Photorealism (such as H. D. Raymond and the New York Times critic John Canaday[137]) might complain that there is something 'dishonest' about the artist who applies himself to the construction of a work, over an extended period of time, but who does not enter into 'any' interpretative judgements (beyond formalist judgements that is) in so doing. The Photorealists, at least according to their contemporary imagery, seem to take up the social concerns of Realists cited by Nochlin and Chase, but they seek to remove themselves from the final painting, ethically, as if, indeed, the image appeared on the surface of the canvas solely by dint of an equivalent process of the mechanism of the camera. By contrast, Gustave Courbet's 1855 definition of Realism included the paragraph:

> *To know in order to be capable, that was my idea. To be able to translate the customs, the ideas, the appearance of my epoch according to my own*

[137]Meisel, in his introduction to **Richard Estes: The Complete Paintings,** 1986, p. 6, singles out John Canaday's negative criticism of Photorealism as typical of the mid-seventies. Canaday looked to European Realism before focusing on the work of Estes *et al* on his doorstep in New York.

*appreciation of it, (to be not only a painter but a man,) in a word, to create living art, that is my goal.*[138]

Clearly, Courbet was advocating an engaged involvement with the production of the art, not a detached and impassive garnering of objective facts. The time spent in constructing his images involved the *valued interpretation* of the specific subject matter. Courbet, in true Realist fashion by Nochlin's estimation, worked-up the visual end product with an *honest engagement,* a committed Realist agenda, one might say. This engagement and valued interpretation produced works of great allegorical significance - The Studio of the Painter 1850-51 (fig. 31) being perhaps the finest example. The artist unquestionably deals with *his* world of phenomenological aspects, but his arrangement of contemporaneous figures, such as Bruyas, Proudhon and Champfleury gives the painting an additional layer of narrative meaning: an overt politics which would not have been lost on the audience of the work. Perhaps Courbet's work is true to Nochlin's Realist's mandate, 'the meticulous observation of one's times', but there is an interpretative embellishment in here which moves the then contemporaneous references away from the realm of mere appearances. Nochlin summarizes Courbet's 'dual' Realist role in this regard. "Courbet sees himself at once as the earthy, matter-of-fact master-painter, a popular

**The Studio of the Painter (det.)**
Gustave Courbet 1850-51
**Fig. 31**

[138]Gustave Courbet, *Realist Manifesto*, 1855, reprinted in, **Courbet**, Rubin, 1997, p. 157.

craftsman working with the tools of brush and canvas and, at the same time, in the iconographic context of The Studio as the Harmonian leader, the immovable, active, generating centre from which the implications of the whole work generate."[139]

The point here is, irrespective of the tendency of the political allegory, Courbet has produced a work with the traditional individual engagement of the realist who exercises "personal stylization" over the subject matter. Artistic, moral and political *time* has been spent by the artist in the making of this painting. Courbet's 'encoding' of the work has also, overtly, extended the narrative time of the painting. There is an immediate and readily readable narrative space within the painting - definitely not a brick wall to those familiar with the protagonists depicted.

James Rubin addresses this apparent contrast between honest engagement with the contemporaneous everyday world and *interpretive* engagement in the forms of painted Realism:

> *Realism, the translation of one's own times, depends on freedom because it depends on bringing one's own vision to the representation of experience. One cannot be subservient to any other point of view. So, while on one hand we have the assertion of an objective art, on the other hand we have individuality as its key.*[140]

Each of the Photorealists does possess their own microscopic, idiosyncratic style (see fig. 55), though their works declare a subservience to the data contained within the photographic source. Perhaps the hostile critic Raymond was right, to claim of

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[139] **Realism**, Nochlin, 1971, p. 130.

[140] **Courbet**, Rubin, 1997, p.159.

Photorealism, in 1974, that, "only matter is represented and only the surface characteristics of brittle matter. The spirit or force that has preoccupied painters of the great tradition and given their works its energy has been scrupulously excluded."[141]

Although the diligence with which the image is made is commendable from an ethical point of view (for the purist who demands investment of labour in the equation of art) the absence of an individualistic interpretation of the artist's everyday world (but not necessarily the absence of significance of course) renders the paintings questionable - at least on the grounds established by Realists such as Thomas Eakins (fig. 32) and Charles Sheeler. Gustave Courbet, and by those likewise who expected Realism to be a 'living' art. There *is* an underlying Realist connection between, say, the Realist painting of Degas and Courbet and the Realist painting of, for example, Richard Estes (fig. 33) (i.e. the truthful, objective and impartial [as far as that is possible, understood]

**The Swimming Hole**
Thomas Eakins 1884-85
**Fig. 32**

**Baby Doll Lounge**
Richard Estes 1978
**Fig. 33**

[141]H. D. Raymond, *Beyond Freedom, Dignity and Ridicule*, **Arts Magazine**, Vol. 48, No. 5, 1974.

representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary urban life); it is the temporal aspect of *urgency* (or painted evidence of it - Degas's pastels e.g.) that is not to be found in Photorealism, despite the similar fundamental concern for the accurate rendering of their contemporary environments. This 'coolish' rendering of the photo-source reflects on the quotidian facticity of the subject matter.

### 4.3 The Cultural Moment

By 1970, of course, American painters were familiar with the mass production techniques of Pop artists, and with the seemingly dispassionate works of the Minimalists. The 1970s Photorealists exploited the seductive, instantaneousness of the 'time' of the photograph. In this (1977) comment from the American curator and critic Douglas Crimp, the word picture really means 'photograph':

> *To an ever greater extent our experience is governed by pictures, pictures in newspapers and magazines, on television and in the cinema. Next to these pictures firsthand experience begins to retreat, to seem more and more trivial. While it once seemed that pictures had the function of interpreting reality, it now seems that they have usurped it.*[142]

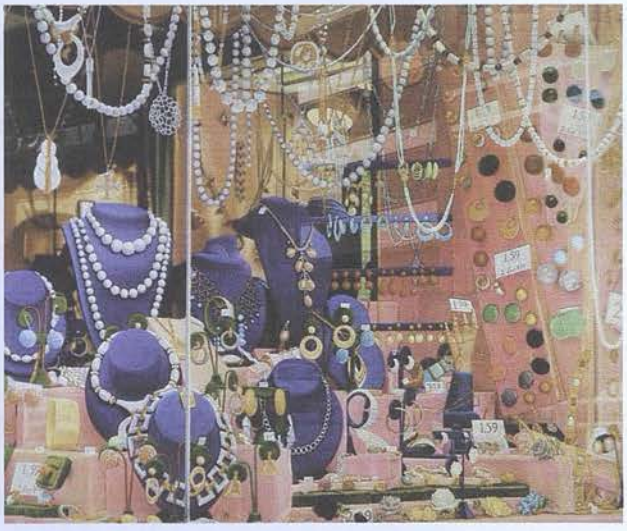
The Photorealist painting of Estes, for example, is 'of its time' because of the playing-down of artistic involvement, which can be read as an apposite allegory for the

[142]Douglas Crimp, **Pictures**, exh. cat., New York: Artists' Space, 1977, p. 3.

distancing of the 'subject', through the proliferation of images and reproductions, from his contemporary (urban) environment: he responds to the 'epistemology of visuality'.[143] The Californian, Robert Bechtle, in 1973, alluded to the mantra 'one must be of one's own times' in his own way:

> *My subject matter comes from my own background and surroundings. I paint them because they are part of what I know and as such I have affection for them. I see them as particular embodiments of a general American experience.*[144]

This declamation would not be out of character in some of the Realist apologias of the nineteenth-century. It implies a 20thC update of Baudelaire's maxim; for "the general American experience" of that time, 1973, included visual paradigms of 'status', for example, seen already in Bechtle's Belair (fig. 24) and 'freedom to choose', seen in Don Eddy's Jewelry 1974 (fig. 34). These Photorealist versions of ideal accoutrements to the American dream, represent a 'general American experience' but the Photorealist image also calls attention to the processes and devices which were increasingly used to transmit



**Jewelry**
Don Eddy 1974
**Fig. 34**

[143] As will be shown, Estes may not interpret the data which he receives from his photo-source, but he enters into a considerable amount of selection and interpretation before deciding on the exact content and composition of his photo-source. However, the point still stands that *from photo-source to finished painting* there is a characteristic lack of interpretive analysis of the visual information to be copied. See the analysis of Estes below.

[144] Robert Bechtle quoted in **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 27.

such ideology. Like the Realism described by Nochlin and Chase, both Bechtle's subject matter and means of depiction were selected to best reflect (and this is not merely an inevitability of Realist painting) the 'cultural' time of the painting. The images which Bechtle regards as picturing general embodiments of American experience indeed played their part in *shaping* this shared experience.[145]

Perhaps the apparent lack of interpretation of the photo-source (the adherence to the facticity of the visual data held within the photo-source) on the part of Bechtle, is itself indicative of the manner with which the photograph and its imagery was widely received, as Crimp suggests - with familiarity, and with some affection, but also with a little passivity. The Chicago born Photorealist painter, Tom Blackwell (b. 1938) describes the typically 'objective' (ethically detached?) approach to painting cultivated by the Photorealists. Blackwell was keen to point out that Photorealism, as he saw it, did not involve the 'fantastical narrative invention' of traditional Realism. At the same time he seems also to preclude for his Photorealist practice the kind of intervention of the artistic ego to be seen in Eakins's (fig. 32) or Homer's major works - let alone an artist like Jackson Pollock. Blackwell writes:

> *Painting a Photo-Realist painting is a humbling and self-limiting experience: instead of personal angst you have patient observation. You are detached from the particular connotations of the particular object in a painting.*[146]

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[145]This detachedness, this unethical disinterestedness according to Raymond (p. 30) contrasts sharply with 'New Realist' strategies in Europe at that time. As Thomas Crow has written of the European 'Nouveaux Réalistes': "Under this banner, sculptors such as Arman (b.1928) accumulated discarded consumer goods in constructions that stressed the themes of over-production and waste. To be a New Realist was to face the facts of postwar materialism." (**The Rise of the Sixties**, Thomas Crow, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996, p. 96.) It could be argued that the American 'New Capitalist Realism' was more ethically disengaged than even Warhol's forays into the machinations of mass culture, let alone the sentiment of the European New Realists. Then again, the extent of that seeming disinterestedness might just acutely reflect the particular ontology within the structures of the facticity of the Photorealist image.

[146]**Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 87.

This detachedness is common amongst the Photorealist painters of this study. Certain Photorealists, most notably Don Eddy and Richard Estes produce images which did not 'exist' *factually* in their entirety, but which are edited amalgamations of copies of a number of photographs. Eddy and Estes arrange fragments of the everyday world into an aestheticized, or perhaps *processed*, vision of Reality - a vision which does seem to befit its contemporaneous urban referent. This process strengthens Crimp's claim that pictures, through just such a process of (ideologically-driven) editing, come to construct an aesthetisized reality slightly dislocated from what might actually exist in fact in the everyday world.

The 'dispassionate' use of the camera in the face of the subject,[147] is a means by which the Photorealist can record the *visual data* of the scene before him. His 'note taking' at the 'moment of observation' is never heated and never designed to facilitate the recreation of the *mood* of the artist at the original scene. Gerhard Richter (b. 1932) makes a similar observation about this potential quality of the photograph: "The photograph reproduces objects in a different way from the painted picture, because the camera does not

[147]Words like 'dispassionate' are, in some ways, dubious in a discussion of the camera and its imaging. The cliche that the camera ensures a 'purely mechanistic' apprehension of an image is of course specious, however it is vital to include that 'end of the discursive spectrum', for many of the Photorealists acknowledged and played with the limits of the camera as a purely mechanistic device. In Chapter 4, I address in more detail, via Barthes's theorising of the photographic image, the ways in which the camera and the photograph construct reality. Notwithstanding commonly understood cliches about the camera and photography, the use of the device and the image assisted the Photorealists in their *knowing attempt* to move their paintings closer to the nub of the Realist image as defined by Nochlin, to use my earlier example.

*apprehend* objects: *it sees them.*"[148] Richter's Eight Student Nurses 1966 (fig. 35) carried this idea to an 'ethical' extreme. In this work he used the photograph to create a 'dispassionate' distance between himself and the subjects of the piece (each one a victim of mass-murderer Richard Speck). As did Warhol before Photorealists like Estes, Eddy and Bechtle, Richter used the photograph to reference an ever-growing visual (voyeuristic) popular culture, simultaneously commenting on the 'disengaged' manner in which the camera 'encouraged' the recipient of that visual culture 'to see'.

**Eight Student Nurses**
Gerhard Richter 1966
**Fig. 35**

Using the 'dispassionate seeing' of photographic means, Estes and Eddy relay to us the replication of an 'actual' fleeting moment of time in front of the shop window (notwithstanding that this 'presentation' is not wholly without subjectivity) playing to the supposed disengaged *'vision'* of the camera/photograph mechanism. As a result, we can believe (for a moment) that the painting is a genuine capturing of that instant, because the camera was responsible for aquiring the intitial source-data.[149] At least, and this is no small point within the terms of this thesis, Estes's painting invites us to believe *more readily* that it is a transparent 'capturing' of that moment of reality from a New York scene, and even if some suspended disbelief is required, this seductive quality of the 'perfect' simulation plays a credible part in the beholding of these

[148]Gerhard Richter quoted in **Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being**, Fineberg, 2000, p. 371.

[149]Of course this statement is more complex than I making it seem. There are a number of factors, theoretical/social/cultural, which have invited us to regard photographic data as irrefutable. The 'cause' and implication of this will be discussed in the section The Photograph as Analogon.

images, and the act of beholding, the act of being 'in the face of' these paintings is vital to this investigation come Chapter 5.

The photographic source-image (coupled with his painstaking transposing technique) allows Estes and the other Photorealist painters the *time* to replicate the visual facts of the photo-source with exactitude. Of course, Estes presents an image which is (once again) contradictory, for the human eye cannot assimilate such an amount of visual data in a glimpse or impression. Estes gives the moment as seen by the human eye right enough, but only after the eye has been given an appropriate amount of time to *see* the data collated by the photographic lens.

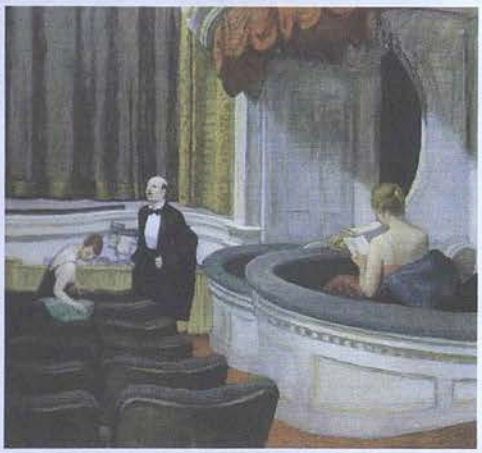
So, the Photorealist seems to be involved in a similar project to the Impressionist as regards the attempt to freeze the transient moment, but that moment is transposed, first through the photograph, and then through the very lengthy process of the fabrication of the Photorealist artwork. Perforce, a contradiction of sorts is created by this 'after the fact temporal unfolding', because there is nothing in the arrangement of the plastic appearance of the Estes painting to reinforce or recall the fleeting nature of the aquiring of the source-image. Estes includes no decoys, no expressionist synechdoche, no assistance for the continuation of the conceit that the image was in fact created in a moment.[150] Goings, on the other hand includes elements and devices which are designed to establish the appearance of

[150]It must be said, although not in contradiction to what has just been posited, that Estes's paintings are clearly visible as such. I suggest here that there are no passages of engineered painterliness in Estes work and yet the paintings do have a surface of visible marks. So, it is not true to say that the paintings have a surface similar to that of the photograph, because the surfaces of the Estes' works betray their painted make-up. But it is true to say that Estes painting style does not involve the build up of paint, the expansive, sweeping, spontaneous mark of a 'painted urgency'.

momentariness. His inclusion of 'figures in action' (fig. 36), by contrast to Estes and Bechtle, sets up a fabrication of instantaneousness similar to Before the Exam (fig. 29) and to the painting of Edward Hopper (1882-1967) (fig. 37). Estes's photographic 'moment' (see fig. 33 for example) is more visibly static, perhaps monumental, compared to these 'backstage' insights into 'general, everyday American experiences'. Perhaps the theme of transience is carried into Estes's works, as the depicted 'cultural time' suggests that the 'inhabitants' come and go, vacating even the urban epicentres.

**Country Girl Diner**
Ralph Goings 1975
**Fig. 36**

The Photorealist takes a very long time to create an image which appears to be as spontaneous and fleeting as a photograph only because the image looks like the kind of image a camera would produce (it is *photogenic,* to reference Barthes's photo theory), but the fabrication, the very *style* of painting undercuts this. As Meisel himself wrote in the explanation of his first criterion, "If Chuck Close were to have a model pose for him for a year, it would still be impossible to work from life and achieve the results he wants."[151] The Photorealist result is one which mimics the surface of the photograph, and when that flatness has been achieved, it symbolizes the absence of

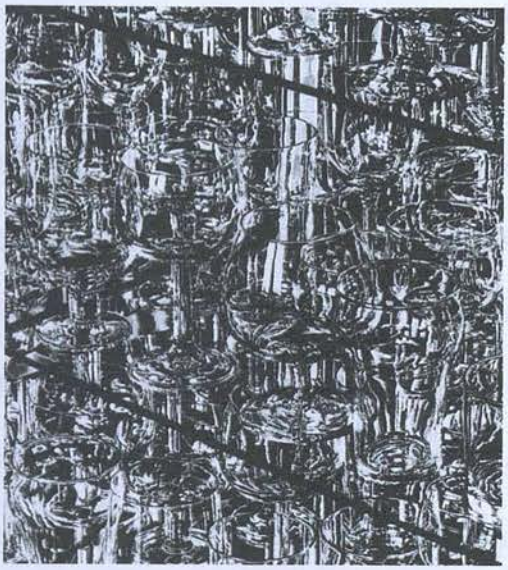


**Two on the Aisle**
Edward Hopper 1927
**Fig. 37**

[151] **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 13.

'critical depth' detected by H. D. Raymond in 1974 (p. 33). Raymond, we recall, criticized the Photorealists because, "they offer a universe of phenomena from which all traces of noumena have been drained. Only matter is represented and only the surface characteristics of brittle matter."[152]

Don Eddy produces images which play with homogenous surfaces and which frequently take as their subject the brittle matter of glass. The artist himself is conscious of his central interest in the relationships between the renditions of his selected objects on the surface of the canvas, and his resulting essays into these relationships presents the viewer with a bamboozling surface of entities, no one distinct from another on a spatial level - the viewer is challenged by the overwhelming *sheen* of the scene presented.[153]



**G-II**
Don Eddy 1979
**Fig. 38**

Eddy's G-II 1979 (fig. 38), is one of his many bewildering paintings of glass. Made using an airbrush,[154] the tool of the advertising agency's graphic artist, Eddy provides the eye with a complex layering of 'solid' objects and reflection. Eddy's is a painting which goes furthest in 'capturing' the pure surface of the image through photography and in so doing speaks about the coolness (without any loss of fascination it must be said) with which

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[152]H. D. Raymond, *Beyond Freedom*, **Arts Magazine**, Vol. 48, No. 5, 1974.

[153]Meisel claims that Eddy has cited Hoffman as a serious influence on his painting: "One of the more formalist Photo-Realist painters, Eddy refers to Ingres and Hans Hofmann as influences on his thinking. He mentions the challenge of spatial tensions and color systems as being derivative of Hofmann." (**Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 175.)

[154]Eddy's father was the owner of "Eddy's Garage", a car-customization garage. At the garage Eddy junior became familiar with the airbrush technique which he continued to use at the same time as claiming Ingres and Hans Hofmann as formative influences. See **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 175.

the Photorealists responded to 'their' cultural moment of epistemological visuality. G-II in all its transparent 'brittleness' presents the viewer with mesmorizing, consumerist choice; glass items which will themselves assist yet more (literal) consumption. The cultural moment of 'consumerist bedazzlement' connects with both the consumers in Goings's Country Girl Diner, who peruse the extensive menu, and Estes's 'trivial' monumentalizing of the Baby Doll Lounge and the surrounding glass facades.

Eddy combines the visual data from one or two or three photographs so that he can include, in focus, the information from each layer of his chosen scene. So, in G-II, he is able to include sharp-focused renditions of the glasses, the glass shelves and the reflections of both in each! In doing so his painting is slightly different from the other Photorealist painters because the final painting is actually something which *even a camera* could not have 'seen' in one glance. The camera needs to focus on one point or depth of focus in each photograph. Eddy's combining of different photographs allows this focused treatment of different focal depths - all areas of the canvas are afforded the same focused treatment. I want to extend the analysis of this painting by briefly referencing an example of naturalistic Dutch still-life painting, via a quotation from Harold Rosenberg. The comparison will further analyze the homogeneity of surface in Photorealism (and the 'superficial' implications of this).

Harold Rosenberg's important review of Sidney Janis' 1972 *Sharp-Focus Realism* exhibition mentions a common thread between some Photorealist painters, including Don Eddy.

> *The nucleus of novelty in the exhibition is a group of paintings that share an aggressive glitter precipitated by camera close-ups; it is the duplication of photographs upon canvas that constitutes the new realism.*[155]

Rosenberg picked up on, therefore, the startling images akin to Eddy's G-II. With reference to the same group of painters, which included Estes, Goings, Blackwell and Morley, Rosenberg went on:

> *Each of the paintings is a composition of shining shapes, reflected lights, and clearly defined details skimmed by the camera lens from surfaces of polished aluminium, steel, and glass, painted fenders, electric signs, crowds, and closely packed buildings photographed from above.*[156]

The glitter and 'sheer surface' of these works caught the critics' attention quite clearly. Barthes makes an interesting, connected critical comment about the 'sheer surface' of the still-life work of the seventeenth-century Dutch painter Willem Van de Velde (1611-1693). Another (1972) quotation explains Barthes's interest in the subject matter and treatment of Van de Velde's painting.

> *Still-life painters like Van de Velde always render matter's most superficial quality* ***sheen****. Oysters, lemon pulp, heavy goblets full of dark wine, long clay pipes, gleaming chestnuts, pottery, tarnished metal cups, three grape seeds - what can be the justification of such an assemblage if not to lubricate man's gaze amid his*

[155]Harold Rosenberg, *Reality Again,* in **Super Realism**, Battcock, 1975, p. 140.
[156]ibid., 1975, p. 140.

*domain, to facilitate his daily business among objects whose riddle is dissolved and which are no longer anything but easy surfaces?*[157]

What delights Barthes is Van de Velde's lack of interest in what might be termed, 'predicates'.[158] The painter does not look for any essential 'objectness' in the subject matter he has chosen, rather he himself attends to the curious, superficial intricacies presented to him by his assemblage. Eddy, for example, is not only caught in the cultural moment of mere appearances - he celebrates the sheen of that superficial world of 'subjects'.

No doubt Barthes would have delighted in *Sharp-Focus Realism* for similar reasons - the selection of Rosenberg would have provided an easy surface of sheen and quotidian contingency, not depth of analysis and absolutes. This concept of the everyday and contingent, as opposed to the realm of predicates beyond the membrane, is brilliantly summed up by Barthes in his analysis of the objects present in the Van de Velde:

*Whether it is the crisp greenness of cucumbers or the pallor of plucked fowls, everywhere the object offers man its* ***utilized*** *aspect, not its principal form. Here, in other words, is never a generic state of the object, but only circumstantial states.*[159]

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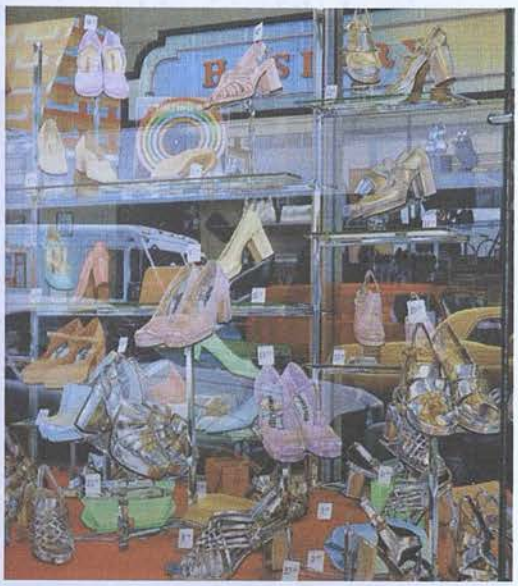
[157]Roland Barthes, *The World As Object*, in **Critical Essays**, trans. Richard Howarth, Evanston: North Western University Press, 1972, reprinted in **A Roland Barthes** Reader, Sontag, 1993, pp. 62-74.

[158]Perhaps this 'stating again' calls for an underlining of my usage of 'predicate'. I am effectively using the simplistic Aristotelian model of a substance, or thing, or object in the everyday world, being a some-thing in which an abstract ideal inheres. For this thesis then, the subject precedes the predicate. Munch's painting The Scream. is a work which attempts to depict, through a manipulation of things in the world, the abstract idea of 'the scream of humanity'. Specifics are employed to speak to a universal level or understanding. For the purposes of the arguments herein this simplistic description of the realm of 'mere real things' in contradistinction to the 'realm of unmediated universals' will suffice, I hope. So, although I am aware that there have been numerous revisions of Aristotelian subject-predicate descriptions, I have exploited Aristotle's essential model. Perhaps Aquinas' revision of the 'position' of the universal qualities of objects as *ante res,* would require me to rethink my simplistic usage of Aristotle's theory. In the quotation immediately above, Van de Velde celebrates the local, specific, surface qualities of the objects in his scene - he does not enjoy the 'sheen' of the objects in order to cogitate on the universal ideals which reside beyond circumstantial appearances. He is as happy with substances, then, as were the Photorealists - on one level.

[159]**A Roland Barthes Reader**, Sontag, 1993, p. 65.

The same applies to the works of Eddy, Estes and Goings. In the meticulous and superfluous rendering of *sheen* the artist does not present the viewer with a terrain of textures and values (either formally [literally] or morally [metaphorically]) by which the viewer can discern difference, distinctiveness and an understanding of his position versus the distinct entities of the painted world. Photorealism transmits circumstantial states - only ever contingent and never absolute.

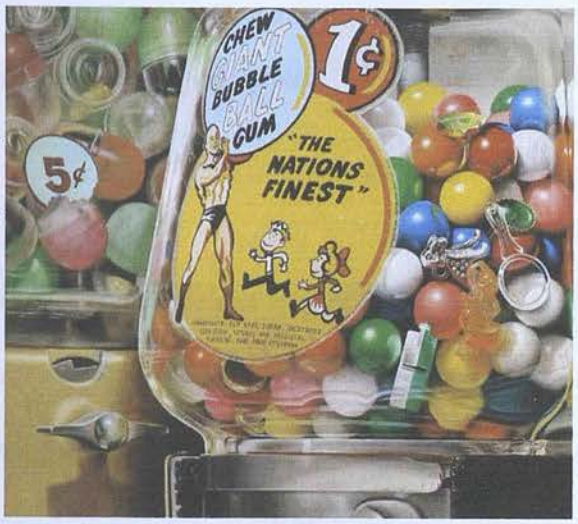


**Silver Shoes**
Don Eddy 1974
**Fig. 39**

There is still an aspect of time wrapped up in this rendering of the quotidian, formed and 'controlled' by the expedience of the glimmer and the surface sheen. This element of time is crucial in 'building up' a picture of the dramatic scene in which the viewer finds himself in the equation of Photorealism and it also suggests that there is still something yet to happen once the viewer has been transfixed by the Photorealist surfaces. Eddy's painting might symbolize a non-ethical use of the photographic image, according to Raymond, by seemingly emphasizing the superficial 'instant', with no extended temporal quality evident, but, as Chapter 5 will explore, the surface of the works can be partly breeched by the beholder.

This quality of Eddy's painting, to be seen in G-II and others, such as Silver Shoes 1974 (fig. 39), foregrounds a 'horrific' Baudrillardian spectacle of surfaces befitting a culture of commercial visuality. Silver Shoes presents the viewer with a 'consumerist sheen' which beguiles and entraps the beholder (the window shopper) in the web of

capitalist desire. The factor of 'utility' mentioned by Barthes in his analysis of the Van de Velde is mirrored in the Eddy in some ways - these are not shoes which are 'selling themselves' through their practicality. These fashion items are at the level of surplus to the prospective buyer. In the same way, then, that there is a celebration of the luxuriousness of excess and super-abundance in the Dutch still-life, Eddy finds a (powerfully arid) equivalent for the rampant capitalism of the twentieth-century. A collection of glittering objects which cannot even be consumed in a state of formalist, connoisseur delight as can Van de Velde's food and drink, or, perhaps, Goings's ketchup (title page) or Charles Bell's Gum Ball No.4 "*Nation's Finest* 1974 (fig. 40).[160]




**Gum Ball No.4 *"Nation's Finest"***
Charles Bell 1974
**Fig. 40**

This element of 'spectacle', particularly evident in the work of Don Eddy and Charles Bell, provoked some of the strongest contemporary criticism of Photorealist painting. Those who interjected at this point, including Raymond, accused the imagery of being, unavoidably, something other than distanced, cool and objective in the face of American capitalism and the glittering objects of desire - irrespective of the artist's claimed indifference to the Pop politics of the subject matter. The critic and collector of Photorealism, Christine Lindey sketched in both perspectives; writing in 1980:

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[160] And by presenting superficially this superficial world of consumerist sheen, Eddy negates the critical trends within Pop art, particularly British Pop, which would have the artist exploit the iconography of mass culture, but always with a notion of critique foregrounded in the endeavour. Eddy and Photorealism seem to ignore the outlook of the critical Richard Hamilton when he wrote: "The techniques of the mass media are powerful and it is fortunate for society that the mechanics of the mass media do breed people with visual taste and discrimination." (from a lecture *Art and Design*, 1960, reprinted in **Richard Hamilton Collected Words**, Richard Hamilton, London: Thames and Hudson, 1983, pp. 151-156.)

> *While Superrealist paintings open our eyes to the visual characteristics of mass imagery, many of the painters work from photographs mainly because they act as a 'distancing device', coming between the artist and tangible reality.*[161]

Secondly, comparing Photorealist painting to the subject matter of Cezanne and the Impressionists:

> *Their subjects are frequently suggestive of the American way of life made familiar by film and television, and as such they are likely to provoke strong reactions which may range from romantic dreams of the 'good life' to criticisms of its blandness and uniformity.*[162]

John Roberts also passes comment on the historical dimension of the contemporary photograph:

> *The function of photography under the conditions of modern capitalism instates a grievous paradox. At the same time as the camera allows us to enter and re-enter the lives of others on an unprecedented scale, it also relieves us of the demands of historical understanding.*[163]

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[161] **Superrealist Painting and Sculpture**, Christine Lindey, New York: Orbis Publishing, 1980, p. 13.

[162] ibid., 1980, p. 13.

[163] **The Art of Interruption**: **Realism, Photography and the Everyday**, John Roberts, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p.132.

Roberts has in mind photography which illustrates 'documentary moments' of others' lives. The work of Goings and McLean presents this kind of figurative photographic image. A work from Richard McLean's 'stable' can assist also in elaborating on this problem of the narrative/historical time involved in those photorealist paintings which have a figurative, narrative content.


**Albuquerque**
Richard McLean 1972
**Fig. 41**

McLean's Albuquerque 1972 (fig. 41), presents an interesting example of arrested and, according to Roberts, 'disingenuous' time. There is no hope of any substantive sentimental retrieval in this image. The State Fair is long finished and the display of the horse seems a futile bid to historicize the (victorious?) animal and its trainers. The specific lives which comprise the facticity of the subject matter seem to play to the qualities of display and spectacle. McLean claims that he uses only the surface of the facticity of the photo-source and pays no 'conventional realist empathetic attention' (cf Hopper's Two on the Aisle fig. 37) to the stories and histories resident in the images. The sheen of the horses' coats is a rival to the glimmer of Eddy's glass.

> *Of course, to some extent, the painting is fated, by the conditions of its inception, to recall photography and the life that is photographed. My aim is to bring about an image that transcends, in a sense, those two realities (while still maintaining their*

*physiognomy) and establishes a uniquely separate, primary existence peculiar to and dependent upon the painting of it.*[164]

McLean's comment makes the inclusion of the date on the banner even more melancholy. The glossing over of the historical facticity of the people and the event is exaggerated by the characters' declaration of *their time*. They appeal to the artist and viewer for recuperation or preservation. They appear to know of their inevitable vulnerability once in the realm of reproduction and simulation; at once recognizing the need for the photograph in embalming the moment of victory, and the impossibility of having the specificity of the event properly memorialized in an image which deliberately elides the facticity of the narrative. Roberts addresses this aspect of the photograph: "At the same time as the camera allows us to enter and re-enter the lives of others on an unprecedented scale, it also relieves us of the demands of historical understanding."[165]

Since the image elides the specificity of the historical narrative in the scene, no distinction can be made between the image as it appears on the canvas, in the photo-source and the historical facticity of its content. As Roberts notes, the temporal in photography is vital to understanding its particular epistemology:

*This link between photography and 'what was' is something that all serious commentators on photography have addressed in differentiating photography from other visual practices. Berger likewise sees photography's relationship to time as one of its defining characteristics. But for Berger the 'moment' of the photograph*

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[164] **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p.336.

[165] **The Art of Interruption**, Roberts, 1998, p. 133.

> *is forever drifting into the* ***homogenous time*** *of the spectacle the time of a past without historical differentiation.*[166]

In which case, the photograph is involved in a collapsing of temporal differentiation - just as the differentiation between entity and ground is lost as the surface of the image resembles, and results in, the temporal *evenness* of Photorealism.[167]

Baudrillard is relevant again in this section of the discussion. The screen, of course, is the epitome of sheen. The screen needs the disappearance of the differentiation between entity and ground. This is articulated in numerous ways in Baudrillard's writing: but his use of the map as a discursive model is useful here. As the screen feeds off the disappearance of the differentiation between entity and ground; the map is (famously) no longer preceded by the territory. The extreme implications of this state are expertly summarised by the critical theorist Timothy Luke:

> *Abstractions can no longer be seen as "the maps," "the doubles," "the mirrors," or "the concepts" of any terrain metaphorically regarded as "the real." On the contrary, all abstract frames of the real effectively function only as simulations. For Baudrillard, "simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or a reality: a hyperreal. Therefore, a provisional hyperontology of sorts, which Baudrillard is more than willing to provide, must somehow define and*

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[166] ibid., p.133.

[167] This factor is essential to an extrapolated ontology, and I intend to contradict myself slightly, as hinted at above, by suggesting that the evenness of photographic time still leaves space for an element of *travel* on the part of the viewer in the equation of Photorealism. This will return again in this dramatization as I reconnect with the dramatization of the Minimalist sculpture as exercised by Michael Fried. See subsection, **Traumatic Ontology** below. There I consider the relevance of Bergson's theory of duration.

*describe what now "is" beyond epistemic realism's perspectival space and neutral time.*[168]

Without defending the hyperbolic disappearance of the facticity of the intitial subject matter of the Photorealist photo-source or casting doubt on the facticity of the figures and objects in the painting, Alburquerque I agree with this notion of the conventions of perspectival space and time being irredeemably problematized by the photographic image and its replication in Photorealist painting.

Whether the protagonists of the McLean painting actually existed or not is not in question here (although I have ceded that the photograph can easily accommodate a fabricated 'facticity'); it is the manner in which the viewer recuperates the history of the narrative that is of interest, as it establishes the offered epistemology of the photographic image in the run up to an assessment of the ontology offered throughout Photorealist practice.

The implications of this friction between the *temporality* (the fabricated and cultural moment) and the *style* of the Photorealist painting will be explored more fully in the next sub-section, 'Construction'. For what might be said about the constructed representation of a frozen moment which has been 'afforded' an extended period of 'momentariness'; what might be said about the strategy of simulating a 'pure momentariness' through an extended process of construction? The time spent in constructing the plastic conceit of momentariness influences, logically, the way in which we read the supposed photographic *instant* of the Photorealist canvas. The ways in which the specific construction of Photorealist paintings affects the way we behold the purported

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[168]Timothy Luke, *Aesthetic Production and Cultural Politics: Baudrillard and Contemporary Art*, in **Baudrillard: A Critical Reader**, Kellner, 1995, p. 213.

'realist moment' will be broached in the following section, and as with the implications of 'Temporality' will form a discursive line towards Chapter 5.

To state the obvious once more: the extended processing of the original photo-source does not mask the fact that the final 'semiotic arrangement' is not a moment at all - in this all Realist paintings, whether impressionist or expressionist, are, inevitably, the same.

### 4.4 Construction

Meisel's second definition concerns ***construction***; specifically, the criterion of "mechanical or semi-mechanical means." Again, he only hinted at the potential import of the Photorealists using such mechanical means, and his summary is tantalising in the possibilities it generates.

It is vital to my reading of Close's and Estes's painting that they copy directly from the photo-source using the grid system to transpose the image. This is one of two commonly used techniques by the Photorealists. Theirs is the familiar technique of gridding up used by artists, at least, from the Renaissance onwards. The photo-source in this gridding up process is usually very much smaller than the finished painting. This is a significant technical point because the ratio of photo-source to the canvas field determines the level of detail in the finished painting. This step in the construction of the painting preserves the look of the photograph - the transposition to the larger scale makes more visible the pixellated nature of the photo-source, simultaneously playing to the myth of the analogous photo-source and moving towards self-evident artifice.

The second key technique of the Photorealists is the use of a projector. The artist copies the projected photo-source (projected from either a conventional 35mm slide projector or straight from the photograph using an overhead projector) as it 'lies' directly onto the surface of the canvas. This technique is used by Robert Bechtle, John Salt, Ralph Goings and Audrey Flack (b. 1931). It is also extremely time-consuming but can ensure that the finished painting looks incredibly like the photographic image *as we see it* because it appears slightly less pixellated.

Meisel points out that those Photorealists who choose the grid method, Close and Estes number amongst them, could feasibly have their painting made by volunteers, and not necessarily other artists. Meisel underlines the point when he writes:

> *This method can be even more exact and impersonal than the projection method. If, for example, an 8-by-10 inch color photo were to be gridded into 10,000 tiny squares, each the size of a pencil point, and a canvas of equal size were gridded the same way, then theoretically the first 10,000 people on line waiting to buy tickets to the Super Bowl could be enlisted to make a Photo-Realist work of art.*[169]

Unavoidably there will remain an element of choice and interpretation on the part of the Super Bowl crowd, but this will have been reduced to what might be called a non-artistic level. In this model from Meisel, the pixellated data, as represented in the photo-source, becomes an instruction manual. Transposition can be done almost by rote. That the final

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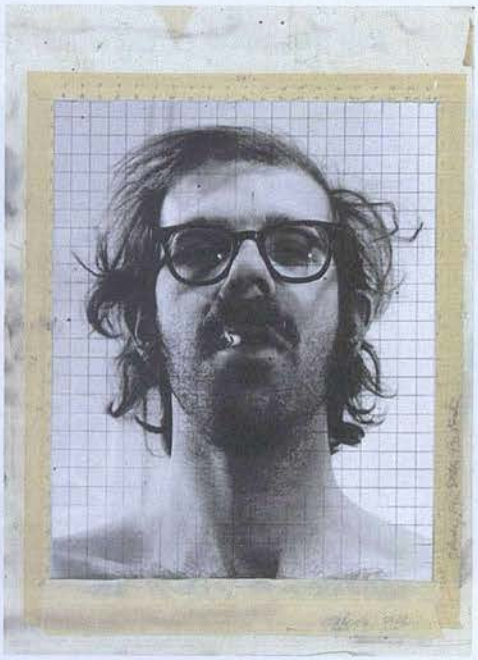
[169] **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 14.

outcome is, to a marked degree, predetermined by the facticity of a photographic *given* connects the Photorealist process to aspects of Conceptual art and Performance.

Vito Acconci's (b. 1940) performances, for example, often developed following Acconci's 'predetermination' of the rules. In one such work, Following Piece 1969, Acconci resolved to follow a different person on the streets of New York until that person entered a private place. The artist here literally followed someone else's direction, profaning (to an extent) the presence of authorial uniqueness and creativity.



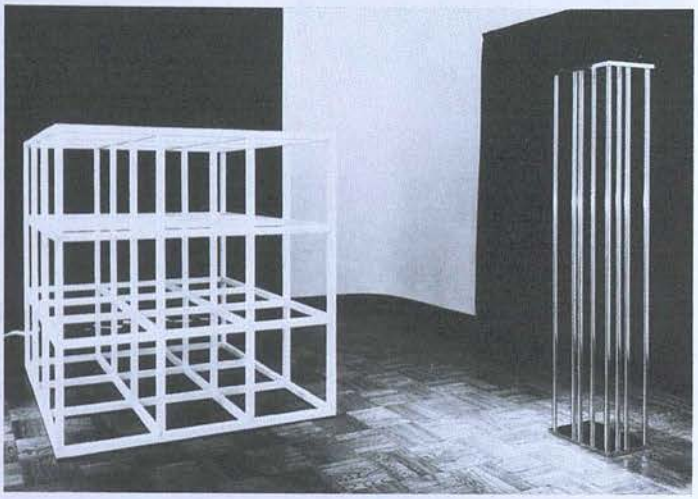
**Study for 'Self Portrait'**
Chuck Close 1967
**Fig. 42**

Even the photographic representations of Close's sitters are 'brought to life' using the highly systematic and mechanical technique of the grid. Study for 'Self Portrait' 1967 (fig. 42), for example, gives an idea of the process Close employs in the construction of the portrait by way of 'gridding up'. Rosalind Krauss's essay on grids (1965) is relevant when this factor of the *construction* of a painting is foregrounded. For Krauss the grid declared the Modernity of Modern art in two ways: spatially and temporally.

> *In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art. Flattened, geometricized, ordered, it is antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature.*[170]

[170]Rosalind Krauss, *Grids 1965,* reprinted in, **The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths**, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996, first published 1985, p. 9.

Temporally, the grid concerned itself with the 'here and now' of American Modernist art; "In the temporal dimension, the grid is an emblem of modernity by being just that: the form that is ubiquitous in the art of *our* century."[171]



**Installation view of "Primary Structures" exhibition, 1966, The Jewish Museum, New York.**
Walter de Maria Cage 1961-65 (left)
Sol LeWitt No Title 1966 (right)
**Fig. 43**

Arguably, Close practices a flagrant 'misuse' of the grid by combining this Modernist visual vehicle with the 'retrograde' technique of High Illusionism. The anti-natural mode of the grid was not supposed to be employed in the construction of narrative, according to its initial champions (such as Greenberg) and certainly not to be employed in the service of a mundane subtext, or any form of Realism for that matter. As early as the Suprematists there was talk of the import of the geometric in the battle against a decadent turn of the century 'visuality', or, perhaps, 'opticality'. Precedents, from the manifesto of Malevich to the constructions of Walter de Maria (b. 1935) and Sol Lewitt (b.1928) (fig.43) for example, would have tutored the Photorealists in the near sacred nature of the 'geometry of Modernist painting' - the so called 'pure creation' of an 'anti-natural-appearances' artist.

Meisel uses the Super Bowl example to make clear the level of detail that can be achieved using the grid method as well as the projector method, recognizing that there is the potential in the grid process for the production of a totally impersonal and *formulaic* work.

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[171] **The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths**, Krauss, 1996, p.10.

In doing so, he calls to mind certain projects of contemporary Pop and Conceptual artists who cultivated a similarly impersonal[172] method for constructing their work.

**Do It Yourself Landscape**
Andy Warhol 1962
**Fig. 44**

Warhol's Do It Yourself (Landscape) 1962 (fig. 44) references directly the playing down of authorial command, connecting with Close's grid and Acconci's 'instructions for performance'. The possibility of the Super Bowl line completing 'Warhol's' image applies also - and that is precisely his revolutionary point. He wanted the image to appear as if it were intended to be completed by someone other than the artist/creator. Such work was a witty take on the mainstream notion that art was something hauled up from within in a subjective, creative process. Warhol here is proposing "an art that revealed nothing of its maker and that presented the process of mark-making not as a creative act but as a purely mechanical operation."[173] (Incidentally, Warhol used an epidioscope to project the image contained in the paint-by-numbers kit onto the canvas for transposition. One of the key Photorealist techniques.)

Warhol's Do It Yourself series decisively recognizes that art has moved on from the expressive mode of (Abstract Expressionist) painting, and also it typifies his attitude towards contemporary culture. He explores the mass produced, the factory made and the

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[172]'Impersonal' I have no doubt was used by Meisel deliberately to establish distinguishing factors which would set up Photorealism as clearly something other than the heated subjective, personally charged work of the American Abstract Expressionists. Yet, the work of Warhol and Lichtenstien is highly personal, although the style maybe cool and mechanical. Arguably it is as easy to recognise the personal style of a Lichtenstein as it to recognise a Pollock.

[173]**Pop Art a Continuing History**, Livingstone, 1990, p. 78. David Hopkins notes that Duchampian concepts of replication surfaced in the work of Warhol and Johns, and then sees these concepts revisited in the work of Sherrie Levine and Robert Gober in the 1980s **(After Modern Art: 1945-2000**, Hopkins, 2000, p. 64**).** The seriality of Minimalist 'unit replication' might be seen as a 1960s bridge between Warhol's play with replication and Photorealist play with replication. Despite my rider in the preamble, a case might properly be made to 'rehouse' Photorealist re-production within such a lineage of essays into the friction between the unique and the uniform.

dispassionate production of art to mirror a society which produced without creative application. Warhol's 'removed' technique is either the absence of critique of the cultural 'moment' or it is in fact a self-deprecating, damning critique of the forces of cultural homogenization. This critical ambiguity can be detected also in Bechtle's Belair (fig. 23). If the latter critical standpoint applies, the repetitiousness of process symbolizes the incessant and pernicious cultural powers at work. Warhol's words were tailored to suit either outlook. In a 1960 edition of ***Art in America*** Warhol was quoted as saying:

> *I adore America and these are some comments on it. My work is a statement of the symbols of the harsh, impersonal products and brash materialistic objects on which America is built today. It is a projection of everything that can be bought and sold, the practical but impermanent symbols that sustain us.*[174]

The quotidian facticity of the 'materialistic objects' may indeed be harsh and impersonal, but somehow they 'sustain' the inhabitants of a culture which demands and sells those objects, promoting an attendant (marketing) iconography at the same time.

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[174] Andy Warhol quoted in **Art in America**, Vol. 50, No. 1, 1960.

Photorealist and Hyperrealist works present an iconography which no doubt impressed Warhol even; from Charles Bell's Gum Ball No. 4, 'Nation's Finest' 1974 (fig. 40), to the indications of 'overdrive' in John Salt's paintings of clapped-out automobiles, for example, Falcon (Patchwork Surface) 1971 (fig. 45), or the hyperbolic consumers in Duane Hanson's oeuvre. The social critique within, or implied by, the production of Warhol appears less graphically in the paintings of the Photorealists in this study but it is detectable. The work of Charles Bell seems to be an experiment into the nature of the construction of a everyday world likeness. Bell himself speaks of his interest in creating an image which has the constructed appearance of 'now':

**Falcon (Patchwork Surface)**
John Salt 1971
**Fig. 45**

> *What I try to do is create a very 'today' image but by using techniques which are really quite traditional. I find the camera ideal for my work not only because it allows a complexity in subject matter which would be otherwise virtually impossible, but the lens eye view gives a special 'today' quality to visual experience, thanks to our daily media bombardment.*[175]

[175] Charles Bell quoted in, **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 55.

Photorealism makes use of such Pop imagery in all its brash super-abundance and super-availability; and, like Warhol's Brillo Boxes and Coke Bottles, the paintings themselves are constructed in a manner which is akin to the construction of the Minimalist work. Bell's repeated, colourful gumballs, are executed using a highly repetitive process. Each gumball acts as a repeated Minimalist module with, in this case, its attendant Pop politics, the brushstrokes themselves result from a series of repeated strokes. This series of strokes is systematic with no place for bravura or idiosyncracy. The Photorealist paints with the mechanical coolness of the Minimalist painter.[176]

### 4.5 Minimalist Formation

Let us consider the relation of Photorealism with Minimalism in more detail. For the Minimalist painter illusionism was abhorrent. This attitude is encapsulated in Carl Andre's famous introduction to a Frank Stella exhibition of 1959:

> *Art is the exclusion of the unnecessary. Frank Stella has found it necessary to paint stripes. There is nothing else in his paintings. He is not interested sensitivity or personality, either his own or those of his audience. He is interested in the necessities of painting.Symbols are counters passed among*

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[176]The spirit of the Minimalist 'serial work' is taken up, laconically, in Charles Bell's paintings. The module or unit was integral in the Minimalist serial, and clearly Bell skits the seriousness with which the Minimalist artist would repeat the 'characterless' module. Looked at one way, Bell's painting of the gumballs declares that the repeated module can be used to paint a subject which has a 'character' above and beyond the nature of the modular parts. Mel Bochner remarks on Dan Flavin's work, Nominal Three - To Wm. Of Ockham, and Flavin's delight in Ockham's instruction: "Posit no more entities than are necessary."(Mel Bochner, *Serial art, Systems, Solipsism,* in **Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology**, Gregory Battcock (ed.), New York: Dutton, 1975, p. 99. The unnecessariness of the gum - in the spirit of Pop triviality - rubs against this ascetic mantra. In a similar way, Close's utilization of the serial modular mark to create a giant portrait head is a scandal in Bochner's, Flavin's and Ockham's terms.

> *people. Frank Stella's painting is not symbolic. His stripes are the paths of brush on canvas. These paths lead only into painting.*[177]

In Stella's Minimalist painting, the *fact* of the canvas was accepted, as was the plastic *fact* of the pigment, but on no account was the pigment to be put to the service of illusionism or replication. However, the whole process of producing the Minimalist painting was apparently of paramount importance, and acccording to Ad Reinhardt, was more important than the appearance of the pigment on the surface of the canvas. Reinhardt believed "that the content of abstract painting is not in a subject matter or study, but in the actual painting activity."[178] This proposition ties in with the Photorealist technique as a conceptual process, before it is a means to apprehend the facticity of the everyday.

With Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967) or Sol Lewitt, say, we witness the attempt to separate art from visual external referents and precedents and to disentangle art from any sense of 'externality'. Art for them was always and only a 'thing in itself'. Minimalist artists did not approach a predicate through the discriminate study of situation-specific subjects - they sought to create work which was itself a predicate, existing purely for and in itself. Ad Reinhardt summed up this idealist position in his 1962 essay *Art As Art*:

> *The one thing to say about art is that it is one thing. Art is art-as-art and everything else is everything else. Art-as-art is nothing but art. Art is not what is not art.*[179]

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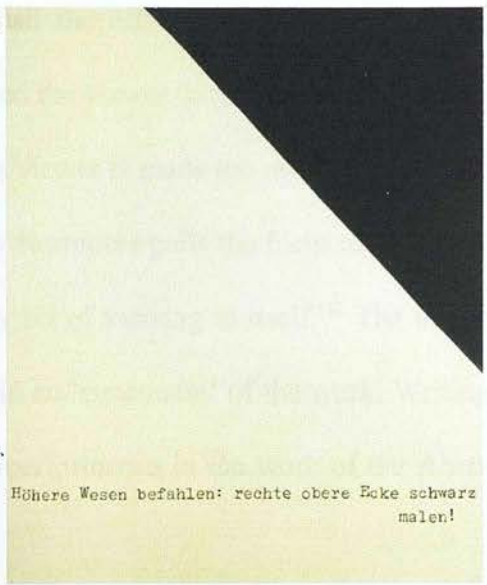
[177]Carl Andre, *Preface To Strip Painting*, 1959, reprinted in **Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art**, Stiles and Selz (eds.), 1996, p. 124.

[178]Ad Reinhardt, quoted in Frances Colpitt, **Minimalist Art: The Critical Perspective**, Seattle:University of Washington Press, 1990, p. 32.

[179]*Art As Art*, Ad Reinhardt, originally published in **Art International, V1, no.10, 1962.** Reprinted in **Art In Theory**, Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, (eds.), London: Blackwell, 1992, p. 806-809.

The Minimalist object, whether painting or sculpture, did not necessarily require a labour-intensive construction. The important point was that the Minimalist object had 'minimal art-content.' This meant that the Minimalist object was devoid of the characteristic marks of the 'worked' painting (the Expressionist mark, the trace of the artist). Writing in 1996 about Sigmar Polke's, Higher Powers Command: Paint the Upper Right Corner Black! 1969 (fig. 46), Thomas Crow sums up the spirit behind this eradication; a spirit shared with many of the Pop artists also.




**Higher Powers Command: Paint the Upper Right Corner Black!**
Sigmar Polke 1969
**Fig. 46**

> *In part the painting renders in absurd form the metaphysical aspiration still embedded in German ideas of art. In the process, it unwittingly took the measure of that intense elevation of mind insisted upon by the American Modernist critics who looked for cues from Clement Greenberg; it finds a comic redescription of their guiding belief that artist and viewer alike must be passionately engaged with certain necessary abstract arrangements of form and colour, thereby exercising, in Michael Fried's words, "uncommon powers of moral and intellectual discrimination."*[180]

[180] **The Rise of the Sixties**, Thomas Crow, London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1996, p. 103.

It was Michael Fried who, with critical works such as *Art and Objecthood* 1967,[181] endeavoured to bridge the gap between Clement Greenberg and later 60s art. In the preceding decade the Abstract Expressionists acknowledged that painting no longer had to concern itself with 'picturing' anything, the beginning, or another step, in the movement towards 'painting as object'. Fried criticized the work of the *literalist*, or Minimalist, sculptors, such as Carl Andre (b.1935) and Don Judd (1928-1994). For Fried, the Minimalist sculptor relied too heavily on affording his work a 'stage presence'. The scale of the work, and its 'obstinate' *objectness*, often had the effect of alienating the viewer, according to Fried, and this alienation in turn caused the viewer to challenge the Minimalist sculpture as the centre of attention. As a result, the viewer is made too aware of, for Fried's taste, the space in which the sculpture resides; this awareness pulls the focus away from the autonomy of the object and more towards the very act of viewing in itself.[182] The beholder of the Minimalist work, therefore, was caught up in an 'enactment' of the work. Writing in 1952, Harold Rosenberg addressed this aspect of performance in the work of the Abstract Expressionists a decade before Minimalism:

> *At a certain moment the canvas began to appear to one American painter after another as an arena in which to act - rather than as a space in which to reproduce, re-design, analyze, or "express" an object, actual or imagined. What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event.*[183]

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[181] First printed in *Art Forum*, June 1967, pp. 12-23. Reprinted in most key anthologies of 20thc art criticism, including **Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology,** Battcock, 1968, pp. 116-47.

[182] As the focus is pulled away from the Modernist-Autonomous art object, the viewer becomes more aware of his own *physical* position in relation to the sculpture, but also he becomes, according to Leftist commentators like Hal Foster, more aware of the politics of the space in which he beholds the art object. In this way the theatricality of the Minimalist sculpture is celebrated for its ability to destroy the 'selfish' relationship between the single observer and the portable Modernist object and also the sanctified space of the bourgeois gallery.

[183] *The American Action Painters,* Harold Rosenberg, 1952, reprinted in **Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record**, Shapiro and Shapiro eds., New York 1990, p. 75. First published in *Art News*, December 1952.

This event was very often a 'performance' of the Modernist artist as hero, a descendent of the artist as seer and voyager; that 'entity' who had privileged access to the noumenal world beyond the membrane. Artists like Jackson Pollock played out their existential being during the event which created the plastic configurations. In this sense the visual end product was not so much the version of the natural world after the artist's mediation - the visual end product was the artist's mediation. The accompanying legend - Pollock's statement of 'I am nature!', indicates a generally held belief that the artist no longer needed to look to the external world of phenomena for source and inspiration. Pollock's paintings and his 'very being' assaulted nature.

According to Reinhardt, however, the works of Newman, Pollock and others were still concerned with subject matter. The event of action painting was an existential performance which gave the painting the subject of the self-portrait on a simple level, the human condition on a higher level. Pollock had still contributed to the possibility of the painting being first and foremostly an object. Whilst acknowledging, in agreement with Reinhardt, that Pollock's paintings did have an existential component, the American art critic Philip Leider wrote in 1970:

> *Another thing about Pollock was the plain familiarity with which he treated the picture as a thing. He left his handprints all over it; he put his cigarette butts out on it.*[184]

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[184] *Literalism and Abstraction*, Philip Leider, **Artforum**, vol. 8, no. 8, April 1970. This behaviour of Pollock is customarily seen as proof of his Romantic aggression in the act of painting, but I think that Leider is right to draw attention to the fact that the painting as object was very much a concern of Pollock; almost as if Pollock had to constantly fight the *objectness* of the canvas and stretcher whilst Stella and Reinhardt embraced the inanimateness of painting.

Reinhardt believed that his own painting had no subject matter outside of itself - it simply 'was what it was'. The 'subject', or anti-subject, of his work was the artwork as only object, never picture or surrogate of a referent. It was an artwork which was wholly in itself, connected to, yet an extension of Pollock's painting as object. Put another way, it was an artwork which existed (theoretically) 'for-itself'.[185]

Frank Stella (b. 1936), for example, was intrigued by where abstract painting could go after the achievements of Pollock et al (fig. 47).[186] His primary concern was to produce just structure, not structure on which to hang or frame an existentialist event, or a transfiguration of the natural world. Robert Hughes has commented on the 'inner logic' of Stella's paintings, with specific reference to Die Fahne Hoch 1959:

**Die Fahne Hoch**
Frank Stella 1959
**Fig. 47**

> *He used the framing edge of the canvas to dictate every form inside it. The painting was generated almost automatically. The results were as close to flatness as Western painting had ever gone: those imposing, lugubrious structures of equal bands of black with no depth and no feeling of pictorial light.*[187]

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[185]These sentiments were set out by Reinhardt in his "Six General Canons" in his 1953 essay, *Twelve Rules for a New Academy* in **Art News**, Vol. 56, No. 3, 1957. Canons 1 and 6 read as follows: "(1) No realism or existentialism. 'When the vulgar and commonplace dominate, the spirit subsides.' (6) No 'trompe-l'oeil,' interior decoration or architecture. The ordinary qualities and common sensitivities of these activities lie outside free and intellectual art."

[186]Stella commented on his own painting in a 1966 article: "There's always been a trend toward simpler painting and it was bound to happen one way or another. Whenever painting gets complicated, like Abstract Expressionism, or Surrealism, there's going to be someone who's not painting complicated paintings, someone who's trying to simplify, you're always related to something."(Frank Stella from an interview in **Art News**, Vol. 65, No. 5, 1966.

[187]**American Visions**, Hughes, 1997, p. 560.

With such ascetic Minimalist painting we have deliberate engagement with a dualistic philosophy, an examination of a perceived difference between the inefficiency of the appearance of the natural world and the superior domain of pure form. In short, and in theory, we have the upholding of the dualistic separation of the world of appearances from the world of 'truth' firstly through transmogrification and secondly through eradication of all references to the image and appearance of the lifeworld.[188]

This Minimalist process invariably utilised and championed the geometric and the industrial. Both characteristics generated by a distaste for the indulgent, biomorphic subjectivism of Abstract Expressionism and by an interest in new-material fabrication of commercial products, industrial and domestic. This 'geometry of construction' was commented on by Robert Morris (b. 1931) when he stated:

> *The most accessible types of forming lend themselves to the planar and the linear. Rectangular objects and right angle placement are the most useful means of forming.*[189]

How then, do these Minimalist aesthetics inform an analysis of the plastic facticity of Photorealist paintings; the fabric of their construction? The painting of Chuck Close results in a simulation of a photograph which is itself, of course, a simulation of its subject. Close's simulation is highly illusionistic and yet it is constructed in a manner not unlike

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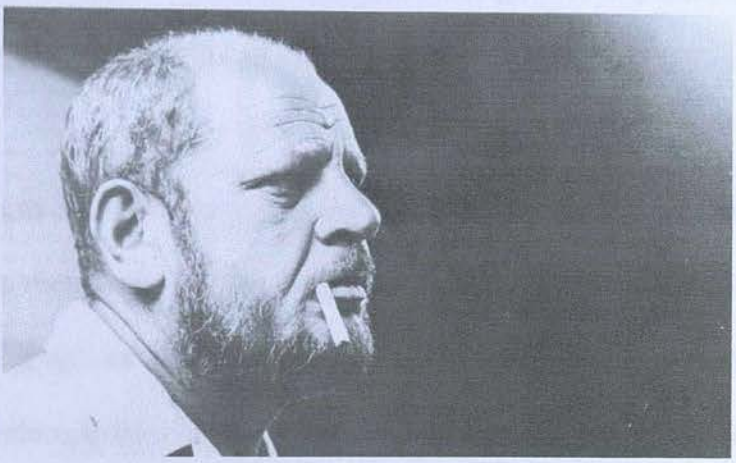
[188]I want to point to one fascinating paradox within Minimalist practice which slightly contradicts this notion of the Minimalist work being recognisably separate from the everyday world. Perhaps it is recognisably separate only in terms of superficial appearances. In trying to explain why Minimalist art had persisted to the point of becoming a movement, Brian O'Doherty that "we deal with this art not in terms of *facts* (what they are) but in terms of *states* (the conditions that maintain them). O'Doherty, *Minus Plato*, in **Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology**, Battcock (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, first published 1968. Thus, the Minimalist work despite, theoretically, existing wholly *in-itself*, unavoidably the Minimalist work draws attention to the structures and states (galleries and curators and so on and so on) which allow such ascetic work to be 'art'. Here then, you have an example of what might be classed as 'sociopolitical theatricality'; the ascetic 'fact' of the work pushing attention towards the social 'state' of legitimisation.

[189]Robert Morris, quoted in, **Minimalist Art: The Critical Perspective**, Colpitt, 1990, p. 18.

Morris's favoured technique. As seen, the Study for *Self Portrait* 1968 (fig. 42), indicates the modular technique with which Close constructs the final full-size photo-portrait. Visible is the grid which assists the scaling-up of the image, and this grid allows Close to regard the source image as a series of modular components of data - pixels of visual facticity. Close reads and transposes the pixellated data of the source image through this grid, imposing a structural geometry onto the source image for the purposes of the transposing. That second stage is also carried out with reliance on the 'planar and the linear'.

**Self-Portrait**
Chuck Close 1967-68
**Fig. 48**

In the final painting,Self Portrait 1967-68 (fig. 48), Close has the accoutrements of the stereotypical Modern artist (look to the appearance of Jackson Pollock as testament in fig. 49) and yet the Modern artist is depicted using this mechanically constructed technique. The grid defies the conventions of the 'unstructured and free-spirited' Modern artist-ego (qualities demonstrated by the unkempt appearance, the look of defiance and the obligatory cigarette) and instead presents a rigid, structured control of the self-portrait - a Warholian



**Photograph of Jackson Pollock, 1949**
Photograph copyright Museum of Modern Art, New York.
**Fig. 49**

version of the paradigm.[190] The "I am nature" of Pollock has been upstaged by the "I am process" of Close. And yet, the "I am a machine" of Warhol has not been entirely embraced by the Photorealist (or entirely by Warhol himself it must be said).

Although the iconography of Photorealism and Pop overlaps, and the Photorealist deals with standard artefacts of contemporary life, such as shop- fronts, ketchup bottles and bubble gum machines they converge and diverge from the same aesthetic matrix. The American art critic, Udo Kulterman, another writer who supported Photorealism for its ability to connect with currents in mainstream Modernist art and still remain apart from them, wrote of this intent within Photorealist painting in 1972:

> *The theme is prefabricated, but the artist aims at an original reality and seeks to reproduce its uniqueness and essence by use of the cliche.*[191]

Although Kulterman would argue for Photorealists having a different intent in their usage of Pop iconography, Warhol's rhetorical wish 'to be like a machine' *is* enacted by the Photorealists in their 'working-up' of the final painting. The process of projected Photorealism is caught up, therefore, in the politics and the iconology of mass-consumerism championed (or at least referenced) by Warhol and other Pop artists, and by Minimalist research into the nature of the gap between predicate and the quotidian facticity of everyday American life. Next, we will see in more detail that the Minimalist construction used by the Photorealist painters informs, and is enhanced by, the Pop imagery.

[190] Such images refer us back to the discussion of the 'assigned value' of the photographic image and the 'meaning' of the mug-shot. See the earlier discussion on page 68ff, Chapter 2.

[191] **New Realism**, Udo Kulterman, London: Mathews Millar Dunbar, 1972, p. 15. Kulterman particularly favoured the work of Malcolm Morley, who openly worked with cliched imagery but rendered them conceptually complex by framing the image in a consciously artistic way. Interestingly Louis Meisel did not include Morley as an official Photorealist painter, classing him instead as a "late Pop artist who, through the use of the grid method, painted extremely photographic images from postcards of ocean liners. These works are however more akin to Warhol's soup cans and Lichtenstein's cartoons than to the Photo-Realist work that was to come."(**Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 14).

### 4.6 Pop Preformation

As a direct response to the ascetic canvas-as-object paintings of Reinhardt and others, the Pop artists drew inspiration and subject matter from mainstream popular culture. In doing so art became something which required a different kind of mediation on the part of the artist: a foray into and a selection from mass culture, an exploration of quotidian facticity, to extract one of its visuals or everyday objects.[192] This source material could then be, apparently simply, presented again, disguising the complex reorganisation or configuration fo aesthetic selection.[193] For the critic Arthur Danto this marked a sea-change in the development of later twentieth-century artistic practice.

> *...it gradually became clear, first through the nouveaux realistes and pop, that there was no special way works of art had to look in contrast to what I have designated "mere real things". To use my favourite example, nothing need mark the difference, outwardly, between Andy Warhol's Brillo Box and the Brillo boxes found in the supermarket.*[194]

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[192] There is no question that this 'extraction' creates meaning of a different kind,very often of a sociopolitical orderin the case of Warhol, but the *intention* of indifference invoked by such extraction is of significance to this sketching of the theoretical currents which have a bearing on the analysis of Photorealism.

[193] Although the Minimalist object need not have involved complex reorganisation or construction, the intent within the Minimalist aesthetic was to move away from the world of the everyday. The mediation of the world of appearances does not necessarily require a labour- intensive craft. The shunning of the need for a labour-intensive craft in the making of art was a deliberate trait of Pop.

[194] **After the End of Art**, Danto, 1997, p. 13.

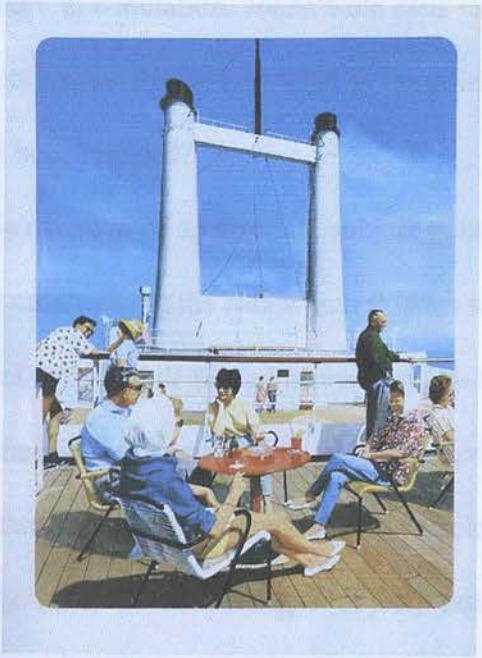
Danto's point is an interesting one, and contributes to a conception of the notional *analogon,* but he disregards the fact that the Brillo boxes (see fig. 15) made by Warhol are clearly unlike the everyday world referents (the art copies are made of wood, visibly, and are of a very different scale). Danto does not conflate the conceptual gambit of the hyper-real object with the facticity of its construction.

The 'designation' of the Brillo boxes, or the urinal, or the bottle rack, as art may constitute an event, but it is a conceptual event. And this conceptual event appears in Photorealist painting in an interesting way. Although the Photorealist painting is obviously two-dimensional, and Duchamp's Readymades are not, the conceptual gambit of designation is employed in both works. Edward Lucie-Smith links the two practices, with reference to the work of Malcolm Morley (b. 1931):

> *What Morley did...was to take banal picture postcards, intially of ships, and reproduce them as literally as possible. His declared intention was to 'find an iconography which was untarnished by art'. He was thus following in the footsteps of Duchamp and Johns.*[195]

[195] **American Realism**, Lucie-Smith, 1994, p. 192.

For On Deck 1966 (fig. 50), Malcolm Morley *designated* the selected travel brochure image as the photo-source, and proceeded to construct the replication. Likewise, Johns had designated the cans of ale as the stuff of his replication in Painted Bronze II: Ale Cans 1964 (fig. 51). Now there is clearly a greater degree of mediation evident in the ale cans of Johns than in the urinal of Duchamp,[196] but there still remains the shared bid to have the source of the replication as removed from art and couched in the everyday as possible.



**On Deck**
Malcolm Morley 1966
**Fig. 50**

The anecdote has it that Willem De Kooning had said to Johns that if you gave the dealer Leo Castelli two beer cans he could sell them. Johns rose to the formal challenge of producing two beer cans cast in bronze (as sculpture ought to be!) and in doing so addressed the socioeconomic role of the dealer. Interesting also is that Johns said that "doing the ale cans made me see other things around me." This statement relates to the idea of the Photorealist replication also, rendering the invisible or the *overseen*, visible


**Painted Bronze II: Ale Cans**
Jasper Johns 1964
**Fig. 51**

[196]The American art historian Kim Levin notes that Duchamp often used materials in disguise with his three-dimensional works. His sugar cubes made out of marble deceive the viewer, and conceal their material. Johns's ale cans on the other hand are designed to be seen as a fabrication of the subject matter rather than a direct and exact replication. A point agreed upon by Daniel Wheeler as cited below.

again. The quotidian is made manifest through its careful simulation. Johns's ale cans raise the question: exactly what constitutes proper subject matter for art and what is the role of the dealer in the process after the subject matter has been realised?

There is no doubt that Johns was asking this question of appropriate subject matter, wrapped in his customary humour, and he was thus emphasising the role which Pop art was playing in what might be classed as the ontology of art. He still placed a premium on the fabrication of the objects, as did Morley in his painting, and this is noted by the art historian Daniel Wheeler; "he (Johns) remained confident that the work would ultimately disclose the process of its own creation and thus betray itself as an aesthetic object, not a manufactured one;"[197] but the underlying concept was a philosophical challenge to 'art'. And this philosophical challenge was as much the subject matter of the artwork as were the two cans of ale. Danto draws attention to the significance of art-as-concept by referring to the artist Joseph Kosuth:

> *In an interview in 1969, conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth claimed that the only role for an artist at the time "was to investigate the nature of art itself." This sounds strikingly like the line in Hegel that gave support to my own views about the end of art: "art invites us to intellectual consideration, and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is."*[198]

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[197] **Art Since Mid-Century**, Daniel Wheeler, London: Thames and Hudson, 1991, p. 137.

[198] **After the End of Art**, Danto, 1993, p. 15.

Danto claims then, that "the end of art" stemmed from this moment when artists decided to turn away from the configuration of form, to a programme of philosophising about what in fact constituted art.[199]

Central to this agenda, according to Danto, is the artist's use of the found object. Duchamp, Danto concedes, belies the notion that appropriation art was the brainchild of artists of the nineteen sixties, but he goes on to stress the importance of sixties (re)appropriation art as the last nail in the coffin of the Modern formalism of the previous hundred years. Furthermore, the labour intensive aspect of most of that Modern formalism, even later examples such as the paintings of Pollock and De Kooning, was in a sense mocked by the act of reappropriation. That a painting should be constructed over a considerable period of time, whilst the muses worked their magic, was no longer seen as a sensible criterion by which to judge the worth of the finished product. Art was to be about ideas, not the torpid orchestration of plastic material on the surface of a canvas perched on an easel. This course of events gives rise to one of the fundamental paradoxical components of Photorealism, and one of the chief reasons why Photorealist paintings are so difficult to place within such a reading of the threshold of Formalism to Pop or Modern to Postmodern.[200]

The paintings of Estes, Goings and others, do indeed rely on a Pop iconography but the labour intensive nature of the construction of the finished works draws them closer to the meticulously constructed Minimalist paintings of the previous decade. Although there is

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[199]Why Danto thinks that this philosophizing about what art is does not 'create art again' is a puzzle to me. The philosophizing of Kosuth, for example, resulted in the production of objects and installations which indubitably comprised arrangements of specific forms, even though these forms were driven by the nature of the philosophical question being approached in the work.

[200]The comparison of 'Formalism to Pop' and 'Modern to Postmodern' is often made, with Pop Art being regarded as a threshold, or a discursive territory whereupon Modern and Postmodern artistic strategies meet. See the discussion of the work of Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol in *The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism*, Douglas Crimp, **October**, No. 15, 1980, pp. 91-101 and, especially, the essay *Postmodernism in the Visual Arts*, Paul Crowther, in **Postmodernism and Society**, R. Boyne and A. Rattansi (eds.), New York: St Martin's Press, 1990, pp. 237-59

none of the action-style orchestration of American Expressionism, there is the cool and careful crafting of the High Modernist Minimalist abstracts. Photorealism, one might say, looks like Pop art but is made like Minimalism.

Edward Lucie-Smith, one of only a handful of writers who have taken Photorealism seriously since the 70s, points out that although Photorealism enjoyed considerable success with galleries and collectors, it was not afforded much critical success. Certainly, Photorealism was not given the same degree of critical attention which was paid to Minimalism.[201] Although Lucie-Smith does deal briefly with art historical precedents which might be attached to Photorealism,[202] he places dominant emphasis on the connections between Photorealism and Pop art.

The Brillo Boxes are once again of particular interest, for the aspect, noted above, that Danto chooses to disregard. The boxes seen first hand clearly give themselves away as fabricated objects. They lack the production printing finish of the real thing - they betray themselves as simulacra. But rather than scotch the argument, this fact somehow makes more powerful the artist's attempt at creating pure simulation[203]. Within Photorealism, the paradox of the co-existence of Pop and Minimalist strategies seems to shadow the co-existence of the bewildering verisimilitude and the clear fabrication.

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[201]Lucie-Smith gives over a full chapter to Superrealism in **Art Today**, Phaidon, 1979, and following editions. In that discussion he detects a classical component in Photorealist works and chooses a number of examples to support his point, amongst them works by Philip Pearlstein, Malcolm Morley, John Clem Clarke and Richard McLean. For Lucie-Smith the Photorealists were returning to pre-Impressionist academic salon painting. In doing so, Lucie-Smith pays more attention to the manner in which these works have been painted than to their subject matter - he does not consider the implications of the artists' techniques on the reading of subject matter, or vice versa. This seems to provide more reason for the simultaneous comparison of subject matter & technique and the simultaneous comparison of the Pop elements and Minimalist elements within Photorealist painting. H.B. Raymond summarized much of the criticism levelled at the Photorealist image, see p. 14.

[202]He touches on these precedents again in **American Realism**, likening the replication process of, especially, Hyperrealist sculpture to that of Duchamp and the Surrealists. See **American Realism**, p. 179ff.

[203]This idea of 'pure simulation' becomes crucial to this discussion when the concept of the 'perfect analogon' is introduced by way of theories of the photograph.No painting is that which it represents, all are fabricated objects. With this in mind the implications of the Photorealists' 'picture craft' will be considered below; the use of symmetry, repoussoirs, perspective, cropping, paint application and so forth. However, that every painting is not what it represents will not prevent the thesis considering the implications of the Photorealist painting being *nearer* that which it represents because of the lack of artistic mediation and degree of verisimilitude.

This paradox of the 'almost-simulacral' is made evident in the Photorealist paintings of Malcolm Morley. The white border around On Deck deliberately draws attention to the fact that what we witness is in fact 'merely' an image. Again, despite the meticulous illusionism, we do not stand as a real life viewer would in front of the deck scene. Instead we are presented with an image which maps so accurately the surface appearance of the scene, that Morley has attached a "safety device" by way of the white border, which accentuates the 'framed', representational quality of the work. Morley has made use of Pop imagery, the finished painting having been transposed from a 'pre-formed' appropriated photograph, but he asks questions about the nature of reality, perceived and reported, which defies easy classification of the paintings as Pop.[204]

The painting which comes closest to the unmediated 'capturing' of things seen 'in fact' also then carries with it, unavoidably, the 'self-defeating' declaration that it is not what it represents. As Lucie-Smith points out, it is the Hyperrealist sculpture which most clearly 'refuses' to admit the impossibility of pure simulation. However, the viewer will more likely be fooled into confusing the simulacrum for the real when attending an exhibition of Hyperrealist sculpture than Photorealist painting. Morley accentuates that point. In this respect Morley's works are slightly different from most Photorealist paintings because he concentrates on amplifying the fact that the painting is just a representation. Estes, Goings, Richard Cottingham and others do not add riders to their paintings in the same way. Morley makes the same statement about artifice more forcibly in his famous painting Race Track (South Africa) 1970 (not illustrated), where the image has been crossed out, as if to

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[204] A similarly complex project was undertaken by Richard Hamilton in Chicago Project I 1969 involving a picture postcard, and similarly played with strategies of Pop 'preformation' and Conceptualist 'absolving of authorship'. Hamilton telephoned instructions to the artist Ed Paschke at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago: "Get a coloured postcard in the Chicago area of a subject in Chicago. Either get it yourself or, if you are worried about the aesthetic responsibility of choosing something, ask a friend to provide it." (**Richard Hamilton**, exh. cat., London: Tate Gallery, 1992, p. 168.) The instructions went on to inform Paschke to 'paint-up' the postcard using an 'impersonal' template which facilitated the copying of the visual information of the card, with no artistic licence exercised.

aggressively, and yet needfully, remind us that what we witness is not the real thing. The scoring out resembles the cross placed on sheet glass to prevent the unwitting from falling into it to their injury: perhaps Morley cautions the viewer on the dangers of being duped by the 'transparent' image, in the age of global advertising.

Something of this critical attitude was displayed by Harold Rosenberg in his essay *Reality Again*[205] which reviewed the 1972 exhibition, 'Sharp Focus Realism'. Rosenberg plays with words in the title of this essay, for he refers to the obvious fact that the Photorealists copied the appearance of reality, but also to the earlier germinal exhibition entitled, 'New Realists' of 1962, which propelled upcoming Pop artists into the New York Art world. For Rosenberg, the 1972 exhibition was tepid as a result of its double repetitiousness. Of the 'Sharp Focus' show he wrote:

> *The element of surprise in the 'sharp-focus' exhibition was bound to be weaker than Janis' unveiling of Pop. Like its predecessor, it aroused the feeling that history was being made - but that in this instance it was being made rather listlessly. In any case Pop art arrived with a bigger bang - no repetition can equal the impact of the original.*[206]

'Listlessness' was detected because the paintings were so close to the originals, and because the referencing of popular culture in an apparently unmediated way had been pioneered by the Pop artists of the previous decade. Further connections appear here with Serialist and Performance works of the same decade which seemed to glory in repetitiveness and a kind of 'listless' ennui. Vito Acconci's 1970 Step Piece (fig. 52) explored phyisical and mental

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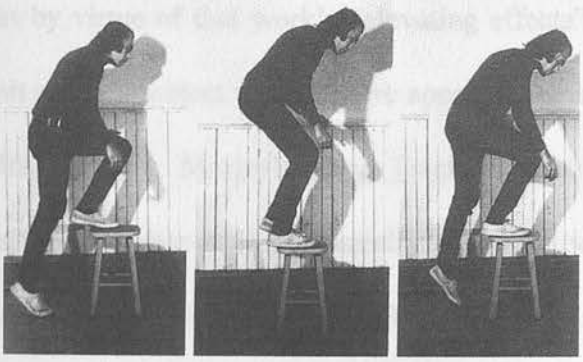
[205] *Reality Again*, Harold Rosenberg, in **Super Realism,** Battcock, 1975, p. 135-142.

[206] Rosenberg, *Reality Again*, ibid., p. 137.

limits of endurance. Over four months, every day, Acconci stepped up and down on a stool for as long as he could before fatigue brought the exercise to a halt. At the end of each month, Acconci would send out to the public a 'progress report' on the activity - redoubling the degree of tediousness.



**Step Piece**
Vito Acconci 1970
**Fig. 52**

But, as said, it is the *very nearness* of the Photorealist painting to its popular culture referent which yields conceptual power and complexity. In addition, the nearness to aspects of Pop art must be seen to be a deliberate move, for if the Photorealist is able to reproduce in a machine-like manner the subjects and scenes of Warhol, then this adds another conceptual layer to the work.

Morley's paintings are regarded by Meisel as closer to the soup cans of Warhol and the cartoons of Lichtenstein than the paintings of Close and Estes. It does seem to be the case that Morley adds to the Minimalist-formed, quotidian facticity seen in the work of Close, Estes and Goings with an explicit critique of the status of his image as 'proper art' - much in the same vein as the Pop precedents Meisel mentions. Morley's critical difference is noted by Paul Crowther:

> *Morley's Super-Realism is a critical practice which highlights, questions, and thwarts our expectations of art as a 'high' cultural activity.*[207]

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[207]Paul Crowther, *Postmodernism in the Visual Arts: A Question of Ends,* 1990, reprinted in **Postmodernism**, Thomas Docherty (ed.), New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, pp. 180-194.

In this way, Morley's work questions what Crowther calls the "legitimizing discourse" of Modern art. The ligitimation of work *as* art by virtue of that work's "elevating effects"[208] seems not to apply to the Morley, as a result of both subject matter (mere appearance) and construction process (mere replication). Interestingly, Morley's Race Track presents a *differentiated* surface as a result of the superimposed cross mark of 'cancellation' - a critical intervention quite unlike the flat, 'non-critical', photographic surfaces of Bechtle, Estes and Goings.

For Meisel, there was an avant-garde *duplication* in Morley's work, recognized also by Harold Rosenberg, causing him to disallow Photorealism even a *rephrased* contribution to the critical Pop debate on the position of art in the framework of high and low culture. Crowther on the other hand, writing in 1990, clearly sees Morley as having the same critical comment to make as any other Photorealist, and in turn, sees Photorealism (Super-Realism) as having, paradoxically, a recuperated avant-garde role within the legitimizing discourse of Modernist art:

> *The work of Morley and the other innovators, in other words, is reappropriated within the legitimizing discourse. Indeed Super-Realism of this sort has overwhelming market appeal through its combining both the traditional prejudices that art should uplift through its complexity and virtuosity; on the other hand, because such works look so much like photographs, they still seem odd - vaguely outrageous even - thus feeding on the demand for fashionable novelty and unexpectedness that is created by Modernism.*[209]

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[208] Ibid., 1993, p. 181.

[209] Ibid., 1993, p.188.

So, Morley's painting, to a greater degree than the other Photorealist works in this study, draws attention to the twofold aspect of Photorealist painting, as Crowther pinpoints. Present simultaneously in Morley's Photorealist works is the "fashionable novelty" of the painting resembling the photograph, and the facticity of the painting itself - a work of painstaking and uplifting virtuosity. This virtuosity of construction is only visible when the viewer accepts the 'inferior correspondence' - the painting is not its referent - thereafter the plasticity of the painting can be treated as a quasi-autonomous 'thing itself'. Morley's 'differentiated' or *interested* intervention into both the formation and the subject matter of the work, underlines simultaneously the critique (of both quotidian subject matter and method of construction) and the seeming absence of critique, a Photorealist trait *par excellence*, which he rendered explicit.

### 4.7 Resemblance

The third criterion in Meisel's list concerns the Photorealist's ability to make the finished painting appear photographic. To be a Photorealist you must be able to make your paintings resemble photographs and this can involve more than the copying of the facticity of the photo-source. This explanation from Meisel is really more to do with the fact that the Photorealist painter treats the surface of his canvas with unwavering evenness (Morley being a notable exception). Each object to be copied, whatever its defining, material characteristics, is rendered with the same even and dispassionate style. This evenness of surface is something Meisel identifies as being instrinsic to the photographic image. No doubt a photographic image can have its surface quality 'violated' by the intervention of the

artist but this remians a salient aspect of the photographic image. The historian of photography, Graham Clarke makes the same 'obvious' observation, but more boldly:

> *The surface of a photograph might be matt or glossy, but it is always* ***flat****. The obvious nature of the point belies the implications for the photograph as a form of representation. The three-dimensional it offers is based on the uninterrupted expansion of a flat surface which, unlike a painting, does not draw attention to itself. Indeed the photograph 'buries' its surface appearance, in favour of the illusion of depth and of the promise of the actual.*[210]

The Photorealist painting, any painting for that matter, can achieve the *appearance* of the photograph by different means. I have already said that the Degas *appears* photographic because of the overt cropping and masking in the image - semiotic arrangements which we recognize as in some way indebted to the production of imagery through the use of the camera (although this influence is symbiotic). The painting has the conventions we believe to be typical of the construction and appearance of the photographic image. These characteristics of cropping and masking are to be found, customarily, in the work of Renoir also. I want to take a Renoir as a comparative example not only because of its compositional photographic appearance, but also to stress the connected aspect, on one level, of sheer *opticality* in both Impressionism and Photorealism.

Linda Nochlin notes the important role of the 'photographic appearance' in Realist painting, and includes the project of Impressionism, writing in 1971:

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[210] **The Photograph**, Graham Clarke, Oxford: Oxford History of Art, 1997, p. 23.

> *As Realism evolved, the demand for - and conception of - contemporaneity became more rigorous. The 'instantaneity' of the Impressionists is 'contemporaneity' taken to its ultimate limits. 'Now', 'today', 'the present', had become 'this very moment', 'this instant'. No doubt photography helped to create this identification of the contemporary with the instantaneous.*[211]

Those Realists cultivated the look of photography, which involved more than simply making use of photographs, and this cultivated photographic look was put to the service of an overarching interest in 'freezing' quotidian everydayness, seen also in the works of, especially, Eddy, Goings and Bechtle. Nochlin explains this extra interest:

> *In a deeper sense, the image of the random, the changing, the impermanent and unstable seemed closer to the experienced qualities of present-day reality than the imagery of the stable, the balanced, the harmonious. As Baudelaire said: 'Modernity is the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent.*[212]

By different means, then the now classic Impressionist image and much Photorealist painting achieved this effect of 'the contingent' - what Stephen Eisenman describes as "a world which cannot be manipulated, grasped, or even touched, except with the eyes."[213] Perhaps as we view the impenetrable surfaces of Estes's or Eddy's canvases, so do we remain somewhat distant from the photogenic surfaces of the Impressionist scene. Such a photo-resembling scene might indeed effect, in an extreme instance (posited by Eisenman):

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[211] **Realism**, Nochlin, 1971, p. 28.

[212] Ibid., 1971, p. 28.

[213] **Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History**, Stephen F. Eisenman, London: Thames and Hudson, 1994, p. 247.

"the mistaking of illusion for reality that constitutes the basis for commodity fetishism."[214] This effect of resemblance contributes to what I will later discuss as the totality of divulgence of the photographic image.[215]

In the mainstream art historical thought of the 1960s, before the photo theory of the 1970s, the photo-resembling Realist painting was discussed in terms of transparency and the 'instantaneous capturing' of the real. In 1962, H. W. Janson exaggerated this indebtedness to the camera when he suggested that beholding an Impressionist painting was a 'fleeting' affair. With reference to the Renoir painting, Le Moulin de la Galette 1876 (fig. 53); he argued that we view the painting as if through a snapshot captured in a glance:

> *The flirting couples dappled with sunlight and shadow, radiate a human warmth that is utterly entrancing, even though the artist permits us no more than a fleeting glance at any of them. Our role is that of the casual stroller, who takes in this slice of life as he passes.*[216]

So, the conventionally mediated Realist painting can appear to be photographic even though it does not possess an evenness of surface. The 'trick' of resemblance which would have the viewer believe that he witnesses a 'slice of contemporaneous life' as he glances at the photo-resembling image, is repeated in the Photorealist paintings of Bechtle and Eddy, but with greater effect (and with cognisance of the semiotic structures of the photographic look) because of the flatness of the canvas surface. The undifferentiated flatness of the photographic 'method of seeing' is mimicked in the Photorealist process. By comparison, it

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[214] ibid., 1994, p. 247.

[215] This is another aspect which Meisel broaches and leaves critically unfulfilled.

[216] **A World History of Art**, H. W. Janson, London: Thames and Hudson, 1986, first published 1962, p. 622.

is this painterly, unevenness of surface which no doubt contributes to and helps preserve what Janson saw colourfully as the 'entrancing human warmth'.

**The Moulin de la Gallette**
Pierre-Auguste Renoir 1876
**Fig. 53**

The surface of the field in the Renoir or in another work by Hopper New York Restaurant 1922 (fig. 54) reveals that the brushmarks do not conform to any systematic or geometric pattern. They seem to declare their artistic individuality through their idiosyncracy and act as indexes of precisely these qualities on the part of the artist. The brushmarks declare the artist's readiness to embrace and exploit a range of diverse, organic marks. The exact opposite of the acceptance of the dictate of a grid in the construction of the finished painting.

**New York Restaurant**
Edward Hopper 1922
**Fig. 54**

Renoir and Hopper offer pictures which revel in the bustle of the scenes and pretend to offer a glimpse of the ongoings; but the paintings, on another level, reveal 'themselves' as crafted objects, organic and mediated. 'Snapshot' painting which receives the touch of the creative artist. The precursors of the painted snapshot in the history of images, offered a mediated image which resisted the mechanicalness of the 'scene caught in a glimpse'. Of course, once more, these images could do little else, but the comparative extent to which the Photorealist

painters go to move closer to the Realist core is worth noting. The Photorealist image goes further in terms of its opticality, its masquerade of a photographic technique.

Chuck Close's painting Self Portrait 1967-68 (fig. 48) resembles the *pose* (Barthes) of a common kind of photographic image also. The full-frontal positioning of the head had by now become the definitive compositional look of the passport photograph, the mugshot, the newspaper insert, the identity card and so on. To see the visage posed like this reminds us of the manner in which the photograph assists in the framing of identity. This full-frontal posing creates, or redoubles, the myth of the photograph as a perfect simulation of reality - full-frontal being *construed* as non-oblique, face-on, honest and transparent.[217] The 'face-on' photograph of this sort is essential in the objective recording and establishing of identity in society today - a role for photography discussed by Sontag:

> *Thus in the bureaucratic cataloguing of the world, many important documents are not valid unless they have, affixed to them, a photograph-token of the citizen's face.*[218]

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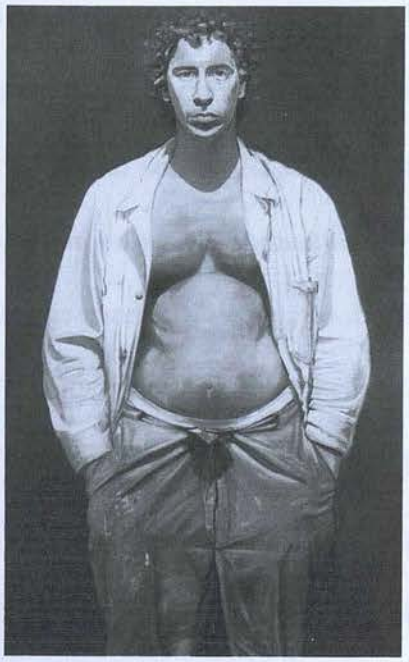
[217] I could push this further by understanding the three-quarter posing of the Jackson Pollock photograph as a statement of his non-conformism on one level. His 'total visage' refuses to be captured in the 'face-on glare' of the camera and flash. It is true to say that the sitters for the Close photoportraits do not keep any details in reserve; all is transparent and face on - at least that is what the studio process of Close signifies.

[218] **On Photography**, Sontag, 1973, p. 22.

The artist, by using the face-on composition, attempts to establish his identity as an artist of frankness, honesty and candour. Alfred Leslie's (b. 1927) Self-Portrait 1966-67 (fig. 55) makes this point.



**Self-Portrait**
Alfred Leslie 1966-67
**Fig. 55**

The artist has included details of his exposed and unflattering physique, and the full-frontal pose adds to the 'effect' of candour. As the artist confronted the 'truth' of his own appearance, head-on, the beholder, in turn, is invited to accept the visual conceit. Leslie does not embellish his image in any way - all clutter is removed in the pursuit of the 'nakedly objective' image. Like the photograph described by Sontag, any obliqueness or embellishment would, supposedly, conceal the true identity of the subject being portrayed. As we can acknowledge by now, Leslie's Self Portrait is an image which has been encoded to reveal itself as an image without a code through its resemblance to ( read 'symbiotic relationship with the structural codes of') the photograph. In this 'revelation' we are invited to *confront* the 'actuality' of the painted subject - confront Leslie as he is *in fact,* we are led to believe, and not as he is seen through allegory or metaphor.[219] This is, of course, just out of reach of the artist - much in the same way as the artist (or the photograph) cannot trully represent the moment of the real in any pure state.

The 'Leslie', at least its arrangement of constructed 'candour' based on a photographic myth, becomes a corollary to our contemporary understanding of the 'identity framing' photographic format. The photograph shapes our interpretation of images which

[219]Leslie did abandon these full-frontal, stark portraits and moved to paint allegorical scenes - famously the death of Frank O'Hara, with allusions to Caravaggio and other old masters.

are presented 'in resemblance' of the full-frontal 'mug shot' pose. Leslie represents himself as 'candid' (not without a deliberate manipulation of his 'semiotic material' - a caution we have come to expect); and this 'Romance of the Real' links with the heightened excitement of Walker Evans (1903-1975): "It's as though there's a wonderful secret in a certain place and I can capture it. Only I, at this moment, can capture it, and only this moment and only me."[220] Leslie presents himself as an existential "I, at this moment" - but, to borrow Trachtenberg's counterpoint from Siegfried Kracauer, "Reality is itself a construction."[221] The ramifications of the image which resembles the aesthetic of the identity-framing photograph, which plays a part in constructing the real, are analysed by Rosalind Krauss. She identifies the duplicitous play of the photographic image in *establishing* what *is* 'real' - a covert purpose of the full-frontal image perhaps. Krauss writes with the work of Pierre Bourdieu in mind:

> *If the photographic image is considered to be objective, that designation occurs within an entirely tautological or circular condition: the societal need to define something as fact leads to the insistence on the utterly objective factuality of the record that is made.*[222]

Leslie's self-portraiture is one example of an image which influences our interpretation of it because of its resemblance to a photographic aesthetic. A similar 'influenced reading' of such an image can take place within the territory of the *photographic image itself.*

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[220] Walker Evans cited in *Walker Evans' America: A Documentary Invention*, Alan Trachtenberg, in **Observations: Essays On Documentary Photography**, David Featherstone (ed.), London: Friends of Photography, 1984, p. 56.

[221] Siegfried Kracauer cited in *Walker Evans' America: A Documentary Invention*, Alan Trachtenberg, in **Observations: Essays On Documentary Photography**, Featherstone, 1984, p. 56.

[222] *A Note on Photography and the Simulacral*, Rosalind Krauss, in **The Critical Image**, Carol Squiers (ed.), London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990, p.19.

One can argue then here for a form of hyperreality shaping the iconography of the photographic image. Alan Trachtenberg speaks of the power the photograph has in effecting this reading of 'blank' identification and classification. He pinpoints one official use of photography as "a final arbiter of identity, an authority over the definition of reality." He goes on to suggest that "this implied authority, furthermore, is associated especially with the most mechanical version of the photographic act: the penny picture machine, the auto-license photo producible in five minutes."[223]

So the penny picture machine, or passport photo booth (American 'photomat') more commonly, despite its ubiquity and crudeness of 'capturing' presents one of the finest examples of the machinations of photography in framing contemporary identity. The ubiquity of these photographic products assists the turn to hyperreality of photographs in general (and any other image for that matter), which evoke the qualities which we ascribe to its instantaneousness (objective rather than subjective modification etc.) and its pose (full-frontal divulgence, for example). This framing of identity (its disingenuous connotation of honest divulgence) is bound up in our contemporary culture of surveillance, according to John Tagg.

Tagg describes the 'hidden' framework behind the full-frontal image - that image which seemingly exists *without* a code. In analysing the full-frontal, identity-framing photography of the police force Tagg writes:

> *What we have in this standardised image is more than a picture of a supposed criminal. It is a portrait of the product of the disciplinary method: the body made object; divided and studied; enclosed in a cellular structure of space*

[223] Alan Trachtenberg, *Walker Evans' America, A Documentary Invention,* in **Observations: Essays on Documentary Photography**, Featherstone (ed.), 1984, p.64.

*whose architecture is the file-index; made docile and forced to yield up its truth; separated and individuated; subjected and made subject.*[224]

This backdrop referenced by Tagg and Krauss, reminds us to look at the infrastructure which establishes a code behind even the mug-shot, or full-frontal portrait. The infrastructure of the Modern state does frame identity, instrumentally, but also reveals an Existential *need* to have identity framed; to have the reality of the everyday world framed within a coded convention which the viewer will readily accept as a phenomenological documentation of his/her contemporary reality.

In short, the Photorealist painting has a complex relationship of resemblance to the photograph (photo-source). The finished painting resembles the photograph because the artist copies the visual data presented by the photo-source, but the photorealist painting also resembles the photograph because the surface of the works[225] share a similar unmediated *flatness* - and thus generate a similar range of connotations as the photograph on that count. An aspect of utter opticality to reference Eisenman again.

Let us then return to Meisel's list, to consider the fourth and fifth definitions.

### 4.8 Time Frame

*4. The artist must have exhibited work as a Photo-Realist by 1972 to be considered one of the central Photo-Realists.*

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[224] **The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories**, John Tagg, London: MacMillan, 1988, p. 76.

[225] I have in mind the recent portraits by Chuck Close, which involve an impasto pixellated surface, as exceptions See **Chuck Close: Recent Paintings**, exh. cat., New York: Pace Wildenstein Gallery, 2000.

5. *The artist must have devoted at least five years to the development and exhibition of Photo-Realist work.*[226]

The fourth and fifth parts of Meisel's definition address the time frame to which the prospective Photorealist had to correspond. The real Photorealists had all exhibited by 1972 according to Meisel, and any artist who had not devoted at least five years to the production of photorealist painting could not be classed as a bona fide Photorealist.[227]

Definitions four and five are more or less self-evident and do not open up discursive spaces in the way that the first three definitions do, I hope to have shown. But Meisel again makes a passing reference, under the elaboration of the fifth definition, to the relative ease with which the Photorealists' techniques can be copied. He goes further to say that other 'isms' can also be aped in a similar way, drawing on ideology of 'originality' and revealing his standpoint to be ultimately Romantic and Modernist:

> *Any artist today can paint Photo-Realism, just as any artist can paint Abstract Expressionism, Op, Minimal, or any other style, once having been shown the way. The work thus produced is of little consequence if it does not add to what we already know in a clear, well-founded, and developed manner.*[228]

In stating this Meisel declares his interest (his vested, financial interest it must be said) in the authenticity of the Photorealist work of certain artists. So those who pioneered specific

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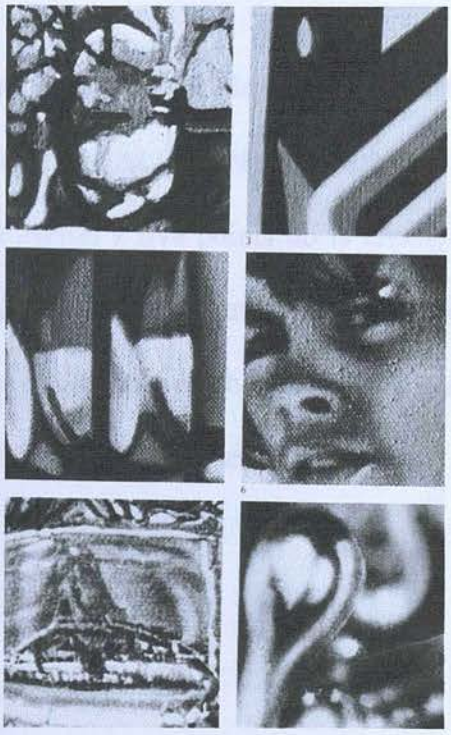
[226]**Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, pp. 16-18.

[227]Meisel cites the *Documenta 5* exhibition in Kassel, 1972, as an important milestone in the development of Photorealist painting. This exhibition played host to a number of Photorealist canvases and is referenced as a 'coming of age' for the exhibiting painters. *Documenta 5*, then, acted as a significant precedent and starting point for a number of "band-wagoners" it seems.

[228]**Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 18.

Photorealist techniques, such as Estes, Close and Goings, can rightly take their place in Meisel's catalogue. Those whom Meisel would class as "band wagoners" who "did not find the hoped-for immediate success and promptly tried something else" cannot be classed as true Photorealists.[229]

Curiously, therefore, those who saw the conceptual possibilities and significance in replicating the Photorealist technique of replication were banished from Meisel's version of the canon. This reproducability needs to be analysed further as it relates to much of the conceptual underpinning of Pop and Minimalism, again, but for very different reasons.



**Close-Ups of Photorealist Canvases**
Clockwise from top left: Blackwell, Cottingham, Bechtle, McLean, Eddy, Flack.
**Fig. 56**

Despite the conceptual possibilities of the paintings, Meisel was keen to preserve this idea of the *real* copyist. This in part explains his interest in analysing the 'microscopic' sections of each of his chosen ones (fig. 56), in order to obtain a connoiseur's knowledge of the paintings as fine art objects, coded and loaded with the specific artist's signature.[230] Perhaps one more area of interest is opened up by the last two definitions.

Meisel claims that he is responsible for the grouping and cataloguing of the artists under the rubric 'Photorealist' and, we imagine, this responsibility has given him special insight when he warns analysts that:

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[229]See **Photorealism**, Meisel, 1980, p. 18. It should be pointed out, Meisel does not name any of the "band wagoners."

[230]It might be suggested that Meisel's close-up analysis of the plastic appearance of the works is a very fitting method of analysis for Photorealist painting; somehow, unwittingly I am in no doubt, he reflects the 'blank', 'disinterested' treatment which the artist are supposed to have demonstrated in front of their photo-source. No narrative, no allegory, no poetry, no deep analysis - only attention to surfaces; misled by "the appearances" to borrow again from the Pyrrhonists.

*The attempt to create parallels between the development of Estes, Flack, Close and Bechtle - in my opinion, the leading exponents of what we call Photo-Realism - is impossible.*[231]

He clearly believed that "there is no such thing as a movement, in the old sense of the term, called Photo-Realism. There is only Photo-Realist painting, loosely defined by the previously discussed discussed five points."[232] What Meisel's five points do is create the possibility of connections across a number of Photorealist oeuvres, and this Chapter has made connections within the structures of the images of a number of Photorealist painters - with the themes of *time*, *construction* and *resemblance* as credible connexions.

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What is the significance ultimately of the artist producing a 'verbatim' simulation, an analogon, even if only the 'perfect' attempt at one? To reference the guiding question behind this investigation and Nochlin's perspective on Realism, in preparation for the closing chapter, "what might it mean for the viewer to behold the end result of 'a meticulous *attempt* at a truthful, objective and impartial representation of the real world, based on meticulous observation of contemporary life?'" As Crowther asked, sophistically, on behalf of those proponents of the legitimizing discourse, "what artistic worth is there in the artwork which appears to be unmediated by the artist, and which appears to do little more towards elevation than show the ordinary and the trivial again?"

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[231] **Photorealism,** Meisel, 1980, p. 20.

[232] ibid, 1980, p. 20.

I want set up Chapter 5 ("The (F)act of Beholding: Traumatic Ontology") by seconding this rhetoric to suggest that a lot of the problems post-1970s critics have had with Photorealism is to do with its apparent deviation from the 'legitimizing discourse' of Modern painting. The 'transgression' of the legitimizing discourse comes as a result of the complex of *facticity*.

We need to look more closely at the predominant urban context to the works in question here,[233] and their emphasis on the 'fleeting' and commercial aspects of Capitalist America. What motivates the 'necessariness' of repeating and replicating that which already abounds in their/our society? With the paintings of Estes, Salt, Goings, Eddy and Morley we are party to an excess, or 'superfluousness', which comprises the both the quotidian facticity of the subject matter and the 'things' themselves.

Central to the discussion of Photorealism on an ontological level is this component, or condition, of *superfluity.* A conditon which pervades the act of beholding. The apparent, completely redundant, *additional facticity* of Duane Hanson's Janitor or Ralph Goings's ketchup bottle is of crucial concern in the closing chapter of this dissertation. The needless replication of the already super-abundant is what gives Photorealism its intrigue, but this replication also gives the detractors, like H.D. Raymond and Greenberg, their strongest counter argument. Where indeed *is* the worth in the meticulous replication of something as abundant, and as mundane, as the ketchup bottle?

The hyper-illusionistic rendition of the all-too-visible creates, the following chapter will argue, a traumatic 'visibility' - one which is completely beguiling but also repellant. This paradoxical quality connects with certain aspects of Existential thinking. In ***Nausea***,

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[233]It must be said that not all Photorealist and Hyperrealist works are of urban environments or urban *things*. Notable exceptions are the works of John Salt which picture a rural setting. It can be said though that Salt includes an 'urban contaminant' by way of a motor-home, or an abandoned pick-up, or a rusting car for example.

Sartre dramatizes the protagonist Roquentin's existential experience of a tree. Roquentin says of the episode:

> *I was the root of the chestnut tree. Or rather I was all consciousness of its existence. Still detached from it - since I was conscious of it - and yet lost in it, nothing but it.*[234]

The additional facticity within the Photorealist image, the deliberately baffling, re-presentation of the 'already given', speaks of a superfluousness which connects with some key concerns within Existentialism, and the intention is to allow some cross-over to inform the reading of this rudiment of Photorealist production when the viewer's facticity is taken into the equation. The bare fact of the facticity of the replication illuminates what Sartre called *de trop*, or, to employ Danto's interpretation, *superfluous*. This *superfluousness of being* is allied closely to what Sartre describes as *absurdity*. Danto explains this connection with Roquentin's experience in mind: "The existence of things is always logically superfluous. Superfluous or, as Sartre puts it, 'de trop.'" Danto goes on: "My absurdity, like that of a chestnut tree, and indeed of anything, lies in our common superfluousness."[235] The 'final' move, then, in a rounded analysis of the Photorealist image, includes a consideration of this aspect of superfluousness 'in the round'; a dramatizing of the effect of the conflation of the particular qualities of the photo-source, the quotidian subject matter and the mechanistic construction.

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[234]**Nausea**, John Paul Sartre, trans. Robert Baldick, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965, p. 188.

[235]**Sartre**, Arthur C. Danto, London: Fontana, 1985, p.13.

## Chapter 5 THE (F)ACT OF BEHOLDING: TRAUMATIC ONTOLOGY

This chapter considers the significance of the 'mere visual facts' of the photo-source and the 'constructed quotidianity' of the Photorealist image for a reading of the 'condition' of the beholder in the face of the Photorealist and Hyperrealist object. This exploration involves the fourth layer of the complex and moves towards the intended ontology of facticity. Specifically, the dramatizing of the beholding of the Photorealist image involves 5.1) the *melancholic* aspect of the quotidian facticity which sits in contradistinction to traditional Realist *picturings*; 5.2) the *colossal* impact of hyper-illusionism; 5.3) the telescoping of differentiation between figure and ground in the fabric of Photorealist painting; and 5.4) the internal *collapse* of the photo-based Realist *sign.* These special characteristics of the complex of facticity will structure the chapter and will be developed towards a final elaboration on the resultant 'traumatic ontology'.

As this dramatisation necessarily involves analysis of the relationship between beholder and image/object, one important theoretical ground for this exploration is Michael Fried's concept of 'theatricality'. With reference to this, I will propose that the (f)act of viewing the Photorealist image involves the beholder in a play between what will be termed 'hereness' and 'thereness' - a form of dualism which sets up an oscillation between the 'here' of 'the moment amongst mere appearances' and the 'there' of the 'pictorial plasticity' of the Photorealist image. This 'play' between image/object and beholder is of course an inevitability of any one viewing any thing, but the specific facticity of the

Photorealist work makes this correspondence a point of special interest, and one which remains underdeveloped.

Comprising part of the promised *dramatization* is a proposed *traumatic ontology*. The specialness of the relationship between the beholder and the Photorealist image generates (as a direct result of the 'meaning' of the first three layers of facticity) a 'traumatic' experience in the face of the photo-generated, minimalist-constructed quotidian facticity of the paintings. Another important theoretical ground for this closing exploration, therefore, is, once more, Barthes's concept of the traumatic image: the perfect analogon, the purely denotative image, is "the traumatic image."[236] So the 'purely denotative' facticity of the quotidian subject matter with its assigned photographic values creates a sense of 'trauma' and, according to Barthes's explanation, "trauma is a suspension of language, a blocking of meaning."[237] Central to this chapter is the connection on this ground of 'trauma' between the photo-based quotidianity of Photorealism and the 'theatricality' of Minimalist-formed Photorealist 'thing': for both the image and the object of Photorealism contribute to this proposed traumatic ontology.

In 1967 Fried published the seminal essay, *Art and Objecthood*[238] in which he developed the notion of 'theatricality' to describe the particular way in which Minimalist sculpture (termed by Fried as 'literalist') was beheld by the viewer. In much the same way as theatre relies on a bond with its audience, Fried argued, the Minimalist sculpture relies on its beholder to complete its artistic equation. He wrote:

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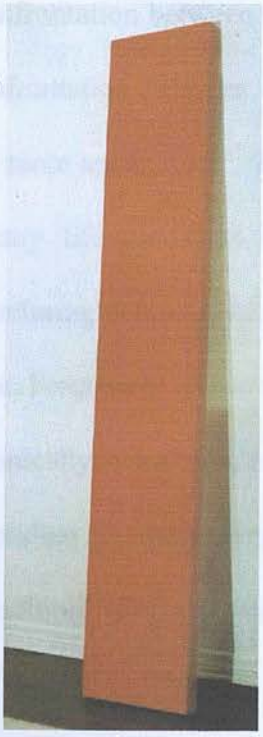
[236] *The Photographic Message* in **Image-Music-Text**, Barthes, 1978.

[237] Ibid., 1978, p. 67.

[238] *Art and Objecthood*, **Artforum 5,** 1967, pp. 12-23. Reprinted in **Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology**, Battcock, (ed.), 1968, pp. 116-47 and **Art and Objecthood**, Fried, 1998, pp. 148-173.

> *For theater has an audience - it exists for one - in a way the other arts do not...Here it should be remarked that literalist art too possesses an audience, though a somewhat special one: that the beholder is confronted by literalist work within a situation that he experiences as his means that there is an important sense in which the work in question exists for him alone. Someone has merely to enter the room in which a literalist work has been placed to become that beholder, that audience of one - almost as though the work in question has been waiting for him.*[239]



**Red Plant**
John McCracken 1967
**Fig. 57**

The beholder is implicated, bodily, in the experiencing of the Minimalist object in that space, at that time, for "the work refuses, obstinately, to let him alone, it refuses to stop confronting him, distancing him, isolating him."[240] John McCracken's 1967 Red Plant (fig. 57), for example, indicates the potential for confrontation between beholder and object. Very much part of this effect of distance and isolation is the 'unrecognisable' subject matter of literalist art - its absence of a pictorial intercession. The absence of the pictorial and the recognizable creates an endless *objectness* about the Minimalist work and places the beholder in a kind of interminable relationship with the work in the space of display which both occupy. Fried once more: "the experience is one of endlessness, or inexhaustibility, of being able to go on and on letting the material itself confront one in all its literalness, its 'objectivity', its absence of anything beyond

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[239] *Art and Objecthood,* 1967, in **Art and Objecthood**, Fried, 1998, p 163.

[240] Ibid., 1998, p. 164.

itself."[241] The Minimalist formation of the Photorealist image effects a similar experience, in the face of the work, as we will see. There is another form of confrontation between the beholder and the Photorealist image to be explored first: the confrontation between the beholder and the 'absence of anything beyond the giving again of mere appearance'. The hyper-realist rendering of the meticulously observed contemporary life confronts the beholder with an overwhelming sense of 'hereness',[242] an overwhelming sense of being rooted in the 'here and now', this side of the metaphysical membrane. Frequently within the Photorealist image, this *hereness* is coloured with *melancholy.* Ironically, with regard to Fried's theorising, it is the very *recognizableness* of the quotidian imagery which challenges the beholder, which captures him/her in a 'traumatic condition'. This quotidian element of facticity both invites and isolates, as an introduction and explanation of 'hereness' and 'thereness' will explain.

### 5.1 Melancholy *Hereness* Constructed *Thereness*

On one level the *quotidian hereness* of American Photorealism contains a sense of absence: an absence of a Realist ideal. The melancholy 'hereness', which I will explore here, the temporal 'moment' of Photorealism, is often the Hopper-esque, existential moment of 'time standing still', or urban characters lost in thought.[243] In 1975, the American critic Gerrit Henry, in describing the contemporaneousness of the Photorealist version of Realism, and

[241] Ibid., 1998, p. 165.

[242] With only thirty years separating the first beholders of Photorealist imagery and current beholders, I suggest that the effect of the challenge of, let's say, 'overwhelming recognizableness', is as powerful now as in the 1970s. The quotidian iconography of Photorealist imagery is today maybe more 'mundanely recognizable' for the Americana of such Pop iconography is even more readily visible in Britain in 2002.

[243] See **Edward Hopper**, Gail Levin, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1981, p. 42.

with Baudelaire's theories in mind, played on the germinal idea of the 'frozen', urban modernist moment:

> *If reality can no longer be forced to yield up an ideal situation as it once was by classical painters, then unreality will be forced to do the same. In Photorealism, reality is made to look so overpoweringly real as to make it pure illusion.*[244]

Henry here identifies that there is something sur-real about the American 'now' which finds itself bound into and part of the structures of the Photorealist painting. That surreality, which is closely related to, if not interchangeable with, 'hyper-reality', is, in part, a result of the 'all-too-visible' subject matter *returning* the viewer to the quotidian 'now'. The 19thC Romantic, sublime 'eternal' idirectly alluded to by Henry would involve, by contrast, the image 'gathering in' the beholder into the (metaphorical) space of pictorialism and allusion. Henry's engaging idea of a 20thC Realism being somehow so overpoweringly real that it renders itself pure illusion, 'without' attendant metaphorical space, is echoed in the words of Richard Estes when he describes the even, finished look of his New York cityscapes:

> *When I look at things, some are out of focus. But I don't like to have some things out of focus and others in focus because it makes very specific what you are supposed to look at, and I try to avoid saying that. I want you to look at all. Everything is in focus.*[245]

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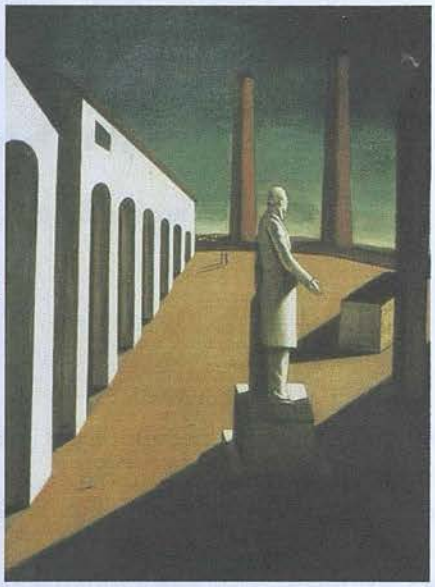
[244]Gerrit Henry, *The Real Thing*, in **Super Realism: A Critical Anthology**, Battcock, 1975, p.11.

[245]Richard Estes quoted in, **Richard Estes: The Complete Paintings**, Louis K. Meisel, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986, p. 11.

Estes fabricates the en plein air 'moment' of his New York scene with all-over focus - an idealist seeing of the subject, an impossible vision, but perhaps one which is suitably *of the moment*, as 4.3 explored. A contemporaneous 'temporality' constructed in anticipation of the Baudrillardian condition of the "all-too-visible" - a contemporary moment in pure focus, meticulously observed and delivered in mesmorizing detail. The all-focus vision seems, perhaps, to evoke a melancholic nostalgia for the ideal landscape/cityscape of the Realist painters of old, an Anshutz or an Eakins perhaps, a painting which would have contained the formal 'value-judgements' and 'allusory' space, of a variagated canvas surface.


**Grand Luncheonette**
Richard Estes 1969
**Fig. 58**

This *even*, all-over focus in Photorealism on a matter-of-fact subject matter, seems on one level like a 'trivial' version of Surrealism proper. Estes's cityscapes, (fig. 58) for example, with their focused 'looking-at-all', present the viewer with a dream-like version of their urban everyday world. A waking dream one might say, in comparison to Dali's painting, or to Giorgio De Chirico's brightly lit and sharply focused, imaginary street scenes (fig. 59). If such Surrealist imagery comprises composite moments of lucidity seen through a dream; the



**Enigma of a Day**
Giorgio De Chirico 1913
**Fig. 59**

Photorealist image, especially Estes's, displays composite 'moments' of 'ordinariness', seen in the camera light of a 'day-dream'.

**Sunlight in a Cafeteria**
Edward Hopper 1958
**Fig. 60**

With regard to the cultural appositeness of Photorealist painting, Edward Lucie-Smith addressed this focused aspect of contemporary quotidianity. Referencing Hopper, he commented on a defining characteristic of the Photorealists' 'here and now':

> *Yet another ancestor was Edward Hopper; some of the Photorealists shared his fascination with the* ***melancholy ordinariness*** *of American daily life.*[246]

Lucie Smith will have had in mind, perhaps, the vacated, urban images of Estes; the diners and cafeterias of Goings; and the cars and motorhomes of John Salt. It is this 'melancholy ordinariness', and the manner of its presentation, which paradoxically gives even the most banal Photorealist painting some degree of resonance.[247] The human-narrative *poetics* of a painting such as Hopper's Sunlight in a Cafeteria, 1958 (fig. 60), rely on the viewer's conflation of the narrative elements in the scene. Although the cafeteria appears quiet, and

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[246] **American Realism**, Lucie-Smith, 1994, p. 189.

[247] Again the ordinariness is particularly American. The settings of Hopper's paintings, and the objects therein, do foreshadow the characters and props of the Photorealist canvas - in a peculiarly American fashion. Robert Hughes commented on this aspect of Hopper's art and I think his analysis applies equally well to many of the Photorealist canvases in this study: "Hopper is like a demonic Watteau, tracing an American commedia dell'arte with great respect for its players, not as 'stars' but as workers in the mine of illusion. Hopper liked painting seediness and abandonment. He saw it for what it was: a particularly American condition."( **American Visions**, Hughes, 1997, p. 427.)

little action takes place, the requisite clues are in place to release a range of narrative possibilities. Such a scene is typical of Hopper, and, as Gail Levin suggests, his "interest in emotional interaction - or, more often, the lack of it - is evident from his many representations of couples."[248]

**Twin Springs Diner**
Ralph Goings 1976
**Fig. 61**

The Existential power of Photorealist works like Ralph Goings's Twin Springs Diner (fig. 61) rivals that to be found in the contemplation of Hopper's stories; on this point Lucie-Smith is right: but the construction of this melancholiness in Photorealism and Hyperrealism creates different effect.

The American art critic, Joseph Mashek recognised in 1971 that Hyperrealist sculpture had a certain sense of existential power as a result of its contravention of traditional representations of the 'life of the body'. With regard to the 'lifelessness' of the sculpted figures, he points out the lasting contradiction in the sculptures: "They deliberately forfeit a claim to serious attention. Yet by managing to be far more grossly radical than anything in the avant-garde, they require it." He goes on to address the melancholic aspect of the works when he writes, "these would be sculptures seem to supply all that is functionally required for a human presence."[249] Yet, that presence does not appear to 'get

[248] **Edward Hopper: The Art and the Artist**, Levin, 1980, p. 60.

[249] For Mashek's discussion of the Hyperrealist sculptures see, *Verist Sculpture, **Art in America***, Vol. 60, No. 6, 1972. Authors have acknowledged the Hopper-like, melancholy ordinariness, without going on to hazard an explanation of the 'structures' in the work which bring such a 'mood' about. See Kulterman, **New Realism**, p.14-17; Nochlin, *Some Women Realists,* in Battcock, **Super Realism**, 1975, p. 74-78 for examples. In connection with this peculiar pathos, Allen Leepa

past' the brutal illusionism. Mashek identifies potential pathos, stemming from the very fact that the sculptures present the *look* of presence rather than the *feeling* of human presence. Duane Hanson's Self-Portrait with Model 1979 (fig. 62) has such a look. Hanson 'appears' with his model, seated at a diner table, with all the necessary everyday world accessories to furnish the illusion, but the *presence* of Hanson and the model is never more than a highly illusionistic surface. Rather like the figures in Madame Tussaud's, in fact, *especially* like the (celebrity) figures in Madame Tussaud's, the *look* is paramount, and presence is only superficial. Despite the three-dimensions, the artwork (necessarily) *signs* presence. In Goings's Twin Springs Diner (fig.61) the brutal illusionism results in the existential import being felt most acutely by the *beholder*, and not the protagonists in the scene pictured. Although, at first glance, similar narrative potentialities exist, as they do in Hopper's Sunlight in a Cafeteria, the figures depicted - in all their focused, hyper-illusionistic, sur-reality - seem not to escape a *superficial look*. For the sake of this exegesis, I propose that the beholder *inhabits* the potential narrative of the Hopper (because of the variagated plasticity of the canvas) identifying with the drama depicted *within* the frame. The even-surfaced *look* of the

**Self-Portrait with Model**
Duane Hanson 1979
**Fig. 62**

notes that one critical aspect of Modernist art was man's confidence in looking to himself for the 'stuff' of his art; "man began to look to himself rather than to external authority." (Leepa, *Anti-Art and Criticism,* in Battcock, **The New Art**, 1972, p.133.) The Photorealist looks away from the self, but does not seem to engage in a similarly empathetic way with fellow humankind seen in the everyday world. Copying *seems to* take the place of empathising, and the works have suffered in interpretation as a result of this (supposed) dehumanizing of the subject and ostracizing of the object (viewer).

Photorealist canvas generates a different kind of empathy on the part of the beholder of the image.

The effect of the Photorealist painting addresses then the existential facticity of the *viewer,* moreso than that of the characters in the painted scenes. By this I mean that to see the Photorealist image fully, the viewer must become aware of his own agency in the face of the work. The act of beholding the Photorealist canvas, or Hyperrealist sculpture, operates within the plastic fabric of the work itself *and* in the real time and space of the viewer, whereas the 'beholding' of the Hopper 'takes place', chiefly, in the illusionistic (but not *hyper*-illusionsitic) space of the cafeteria. With Photorealism, the acute illusionism, whose subject matter is a quotidian facticity, returns the viewer to the melancholy sense of 'groundedness' in the face of the ordinary.

**Standing Female Model and Mirror**
Philip Pearlstein 1973
**Fig. 63**

In contrast, Philip Pearlstein's Standing Female Model and Mirror 1979 (fig. 63), has 'photographically informal' (resemblance) characteristics, seen already with Degas and Hopper (4.7). The arrangement of the semiotic material may cause the figures to resemble 'figures as caught by a preliminary snapshot', but they are constructed, over an extended period of time, in an 'organically plastic' manner. The Pearlstein is illusionistic but not meticulously bound to the totality of the visual data held in the facticity of the models in the studio space at that time. Pearlstein's painting presents a mediated, painted world - his painting *is* a picture.[250]

[250]Harold Rosenberg, of course, famously wrote that the American painters of the forties and fifties came round to the idea that "what was to go on to the canvas was not a *picture* but an event." (**Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record,** Shapiro and Shapiro, (eds.), 1990, p. 76). The event of the American Action painters was a more dramatic event than that

Through the organic nature of the plastic construction he presents an illusory space 'in' which the viewer can enjoy the mediated messages of Pearlstein's art. His figures 'exist' in the illusory, mediated space of the *picture:* the artist invites us to 'move in' to the fictive space to meet the subject matter; the figures are to be *witnessed,* they accentuate their *thereness.* The viewer can accept Pearlstein's painted gambit, so to speak, and likely empathise with '*those* figures in *that* space'. There is not the immanent performative relationship with this work as there is with McCracken's Red Plant (fig. 57), for example. The viewer is in 'no doubt' about the Pearlstein as a record of those figures having '*been* in the world', but the viewer thereafter engages with his own being in the world indirectly - through a form of empathy.[251] He is not 'thrown back' on himself, for the intercessory marks within the Pearlstein allow him to remain (figuratively speaking) within the illusion of the painting as a picture.

This tactic of illusionism was customary, of course, in the works of traditional Realism of the nineteenth-century, and underpins Linda Nochlin's 1971 investigation of painted Realism which has acted as *leit motiv* herein.[252] The work of the Ashcan School, for example, presented a clear *picture*, which allowed for allegorical and value interpretations, *in the picture space*. As seen above, Thomas Anshutz's (1851-1912), Ironworkers' Noontime Rest 1880 (fig. 17) invites the viewer to explore the illusionistic picture and also invites the viewer to explore the *social*-narrative space implicit in the particular picturing.

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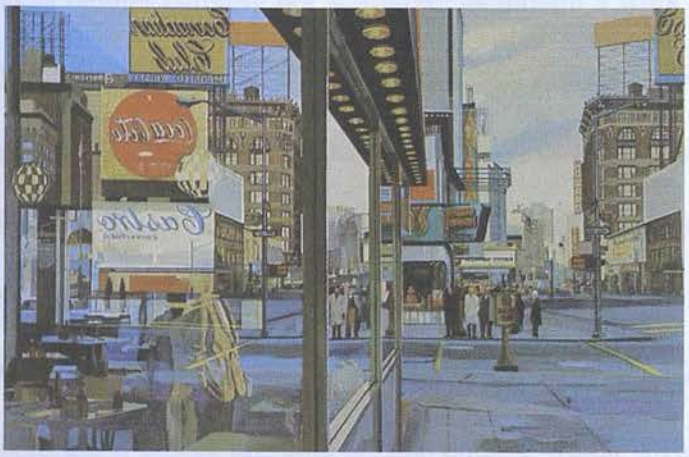
produced by the field painters, but the same point applies to both styles of American Abstract Expressionism. The event was to be in some way reenacted by the viewer and thus the message, or force, of the painting was more powerful having not been transmuted through an illustrated narrative.

[251]The painting of Lucien Freud is often deemed to possess this quality. The canvases laden with paint, present empirical 'evidence' of the 'matter of the body' having been in the room or studio depicted.

[252]Indeed, it might be said that the very technique of Realist painting of the nineteenth century contained its own allegorical properties, by dint of it 'paying attention' to realistic detail: Courbet's statement, "I am not only a socialist but a democrat and a Republican as well - in a word, a partisan of all the revolution and above all a Realist...for 'Realist' means a sincere lover of the honest truth" tells of the political significance of Realism as the chosen painting style, even before the allegorizing subject matter had been decided upon and depicted. (See *The Rhetoric of Realism: Courbet and the Origins of the Avante-Garde*, in **Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History**, Eisenman, 1996, p.206.

In time, the viewer can return to contemplate the implications of such a picture on his own interpretation of the "proletarian America"[253] which Anshutz clearly addresses; but the beholding involves the exploration and interpretation of the scene as *pictured* within the frame. Various classical, pictorial elements facilitate the viewer's journey through the work: the three-quarter stance of the figure furthest right acts as a repoussoir and begins a chain of formal links across the figures. For example; the steep recession is checked by the full-frontal figure at the left of the canvas which then allows the viewer to 'travel into' the painting across the oustretched arm of the character who dons his jacket. Photorealist painting offers similarly constructed pictorial guides, Estes's Poussin-esque 46th and Broadway 1969 (fig. 64) makes this clear, but the photo-realism, the 'photo-surreality' perhaps, stresses the superficial over the perspectival, and reels back the fictive space to the canvas surface.



**46th and Broadway**
Richard Estes 1969
**Fig. 64**

The effect of 'objecthood' of the superficial surface within Photorealist painting provides another point of connection to Fried's concept of theatricality. For the viewer to be confronted with his own immanent presence after having been made to *see himself in the face of the work* is the same condition found, by Michael Fried, in the face of the

[253] **American Realism**, Lucie-Smith, 1994, p. 63. Robert Hughes also comments on this painting by Anschutz, seeing it likewise as an allegory of American industrialization. Interestingly, Hughes notes that the accuracy of the scene depicted here came about through "studio sketches, memories of antique sculpture, and possibly photographs" (**American Visions**, Hughes, 1997, p.301) telling of the multifaceted components in the work. Such a combination of sources and practices is not to be found in the work of the Photorealists (with the possible exception of Richard Estes) because of their insistence on transposing the data given to them by the photo-source. They transpose the facticity of the photo-source and do not conflate a range of 'data sources', in other words.

objecthood of the Literalist artwork. Literalist art, like McCracken's, declares itself, willingly, to be *an object.* Not a picture, like the Anschutz, but an object, with its own peculiar 'objecthood'. Literalist art in the 1960s, according to Michael Fried, became established "if not as nonart, at least as neither painting nor sculpture; as though a work of art - more accurately, a work of modernist painting or sculpture - were in some essential respect *not an object."*[254] This relates to the complex paradox of the Photorealist painting being simultaneously; the flat *painting* of conventional, Greenbergian Modernism; as well as, a *picturing* of an American scene, like, in principle, an Anshutz or a Hopper; as well as being, thirdly, a literalist 'brick wall'. One which returns the viewer's gaze and which asserts its own objecthood. The Photorealist image presents an immanence which speaks about the ***hereness*** of the viewer despite the fact that an illusory fictive, and sometimes 'potential narrative fictive', space can also be present in the interpretative performance. The brick wall put up by the high illusionism seems to check the viewer's progression into what ought to be an easily accessible picture. Still the paintings and sculptures 'contain' a melancholy text - a silent, static literalness which places a performative onus on the viewer and entices him into a 'seeing' of his 'being in the space'.

This process of locating the viewer has a precedent in the rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism, although, as we will see, with Photorealism, ultimately, the result is 'sublimely' terrestrial.

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[254]Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood (1967), in* **Art and Objecthood**, Fried, 1998, p. 152.

## 5.2 Colossal Illusionism

Photorealist paintings act on the viewer with similar power to the abstracts of Barnett Newman (1905-1970) for they too accentuate man's irrefutable *hereness* to similar effect, even if by different plastic means. A comparison to Barnett Newman's Abstract Expressionist painting will illuminate and locate this component of *melancholic hereness* within the Photorealist image, which is brought about by the confrontation between the viewer and quotidian facticity - underpinned by the 'photographic' surface of the works.

Speaking about Vir Heroicus Sublimis,[255] 1950 (fig. 65), Newman stated: "It is not the fleeting here and now that is to be enjoyed, but the everlasting unity and presence of transcendence."[256] Newman claimed that these abstract renditions would make the experience of the subject more intensely *personal* for the viewer. Through abstract gesture, of a highly minimalist order, the heroicism of the narrative intimated would be felt all the more acutely. Lawrence Alloway, writing in 1966, addressed this aspect of Newman's project, and typified the rhetoric of the day:

> *Gesture becomes the **artist's** act, not that of his subject, and in this form is accessible without the peculiarities of musculature and drapery. Thus when*

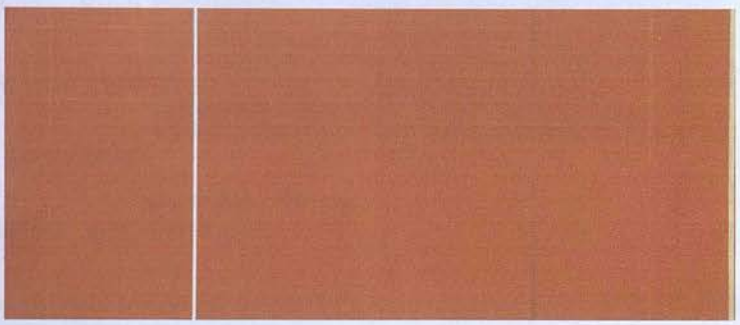
[255]David Anfam speaks about Newman's use of the field of intense colour, punctured by the zip: "...whether it is this blaze, the preternatural ultramarine of *Cathedra,* the all-black *Abraham* or the all-white *The Voice* and *The Name*, each hue is declared with a sweep which humbles description. Here the 'zips' function by acting as our guides to the potentially inchoate field as they focus, measure and stabilize the gaze."(**Abstract Expressionism**, David Anfam, London: Thames and Hudson, 1990, p. 148.) This stabilizing fixes the viewer in a dialogue with the overpowering field - the zip acts then as guide *and* entrance to an existential void of sorts.

[256]Barnett Newman, quoted in, **Art Since Mid-Century**, Wheeler, 1991, p. 53. In this sense Newman's paintings avoid being classed as Existentialist, for his aim is not to produce a parody of man's irrefutable presence on earth, rather the drawing attention to 'being' is designed to be a liberating experience of sorts - the works are emancipatory in the way the altarpiece intends.

*Newman paints the Stations of the Cross in terms of his gesture, he is taking possession of the traditional theme on his own terms, but these terms include his homage to the original content.*[257]

This insightful underwriting is followed by a phrase which sums up Newman's abstract practice; "His concern with religious and mythical content never delivers an idol but a presence. The presence is one that the artist shares with any evoked hero or god because it is in his work that the presence is constructed and revealed."[258]

Through ascetic abstractions and careful, geometric construction, therefore, Newman created a form of painting which sought to emphasize the presence of the viewer, or as David Anfam writes: "Facing the perfect square framed by the two innermost 'zips', yet aware of their echoes that resound to the outer margins, ours is the true 'vital center' before Vir Heroicus Sublimis."[259] The photoportraits of Chuck Close (and the renditions of the mundane by Richard Estes, Ralph Goings and Duane Hanson, for examples) present the viewer with a similar recognition of his/her own 'immanent



**Vir Heroicus Sublimis**
Barnett Newman 1950
**Fig. 65**

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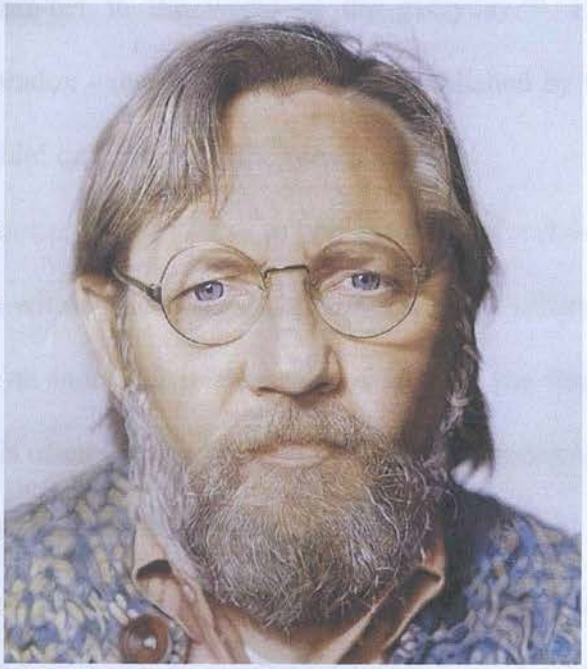
[257]Lawrence Alloway, *Barnett Newman: The Stations of the Cross*, in **The Stations of the Cross: Lema Sabachtani,** exh. cat., New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1966, reprinted in, **Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record**, Shapiro and Shapiro (eds.), 1990, p. 341.

[258]Alloway, *Newman:The Stations of the Cross*, in **Abstract Expressionism: A Critical Record,** Shapiro and Shapiro, 1990, p.341.

[259]**Abstract Expressionism**, Anfam, 1990, p.149.

presence'; this time through the meticulous, controlled gesture. John 1971-72 (fig. 66), for example, creates a sense in the beholder of immanent presence - in other words, the work encourages the viewer to become conscious of themselves being the 'vital center' of the 'performance of viewing'. To a similar extent as the vast Vir Heroicus Sublimis, the viewer of Photorealist painting and Hyperrealist sculpture is confronted with the 'colossal' fact of high-illusionism. Such high-illusionism fills the canvas field (and by virtue of the canvas area, the *visual* field) with its sheer literalness, and, metaphorically, in some way, seemingly loads the space of interpretative possibilities which is one special quality of the mythical analogon. The colossal, 'total divulgence' of the super-detail in Close's photoportraits, and the 'inane mimicking of the everyday' in the work of Estes and Charles Bell for example, can be read as an apposite, contemporary, 'heroic' component of Photorealism. One which calls the viewer to address his/her own facticity and 'matter of factness' - not against a backdrop of potential, transcendental sublimity (Newman, Rothko) but against the familiar backdrop of quotidianity. The brick wall of literal, high-illusionism draws the viewer up against his own melancholy hereness.[260] The 'zip' fixes the viewer of the Newman and then acts, possibly, as an access



**John**
Chuck Close 1971-72
**Fig. 66**

[260]This relates again to what Morley was driving at by classing two-dimensional images as pornographic. The high-illusionism of the Photorealist image seduces the viewer into its seeming 'generosity of divulgence', as would the pin-up girl, but the illusion is protected by the force field of the picture plane. As Kim Levin observed, "the flat surface of painting is 'pornographic' because it leads you on to unfulfillable desires: no matter how exactly it reproduces the world, you cannot enter its space, possess its images, or eat its grapes." (Kim Levin, *Malcolm Morley: Post-Style Illusionism,* in

point to a sublime realm: the brick wall of sheer illusion in Close's John and Salt's Blue Chrysler with Brick Wall (fig. 7) for example, first fixes the viewer against his/her melancholy hereness and then returns him/her to the world of the everyday.[261] This manifests the power of the Photorealist paradox - the paradox which is established by the high-illusion being enticing but 'impenetrable' on 'arrival' at the canvas surface.

The photographic image is, of course, fundamental to the creation of colossal illusionism, and the crucial role it is given within Photorealism contributes to the effect of melancholy to boot. The photograph has an indexical relationship of sorts to the 'thing photographed', as mentioned (3.3), and it is often incorporated into the task of cataloguing and 'proving beyond doubt' the (absurd) existence of the world and all its things.

Roland Barthes comments on the capacity of the photograph to first catalogue and 'trap' the world of the everyday, and it is this melancholic quality of the photograph which seems to haunt him throughout his study of the photographic image in *Camera Lucida*:

> *The essence of the photograph could not, in my mind, be separated from the "pathos" of which, from the first glance it consists.*[262]

The photograph allows the Photorealist painting to register similar pathos or melancholia but by way of different semiotic structures. These 'internal' structures can inform the

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**Super Realism,** Battcock, 1975, p.179.) However, to stress the point made in the text above, the interpretative possibilities do not end with the viewer's deflation at being unable to penetrate the beguiling, illusionistic scene. The *knowing* of the depicted world of high-illusionistic painting is turned upon the viewer - as is the knowing of the 'illusion of the beguiling external world' in certain ontologies to be introduced at a later stage in this thesis.

[261] This may not include access to a divine or sublime realm - which might qualify Photorealism as a form of secular, grounded Postmodernism; it certainly continues its connection to a phenomenological world-view. Phillip Blond explains the absence of god in phenomenology by first quoting Husserl: " 'I must accomplish a *phenomenological reduction: I must exclude all that is transcendently posited'*. It was Husserl who, by wishing to locate the ground of Being wholly in beings, forbade God to phenomenology. This erasure of God from phenomena takes place because for Husserl, and for the new science of phenomenology, the world is now the creation of human rather than divine intentionality." (Phillip Blond, *Emmanuel Levinas: God and Phenomenology*, in **Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology**, Phillip Blond (ed.), London: Routledge, 1998, p. 195.

[262] **Camera Lucida**, Barthes, 1984, first published 1980, p.21.

'external' structures of the (f)act of beholding the artworks. The 'urban', melancholic moment in the face of the picture of Photorealist illusionistic 'picturing' is paralleled and supported by the effect on beholding of the structures of the Photorealist 'object'. In some ways the plastic arrangement of the picture, and the theatrical consequence of that arrangement, mirrors an Existentialist ontological model: the terms 'entity' and 'ground' will serve to elaborate on the connection.

### 5.3 Entity and Ground

As consciousness is necessarily consciousness of something within an Existentialist outlook; the beholding of that something rests on the separation of that *something* from its *ground*. Furthermore, in the words of philosopher and translator of Sartre, Christina Howells:

> *It is also to be aware that the object* (the something of consciousness) *is not the same as the awareness.* [263]

So, the 'something of consciousness', or the *object* of consciousness is distinguishable both from the ground which 'presents' the object in the everyday world, *and* the *act* of being conscious of that object. In this process of being conscious of something, then, the beholder is necessarily and acutely aware of the *position* of the object of consciousness.

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[263] **Sartre**, Christina Howells (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, first published 1992, p. 18.

This is an Existential model of 'consciousness in the everyday world' and it reconnects us to the relationship between individual/object created within the situation of theatricality described in Fried's 'ontology', which is itself predicated on the Existentialist ontology of 'individual' in the face of the 'world' (work). The beholder in the situation of the literalist artwork is made to become acutely aware of the *being in the face of the work.* The beholder becomes aware of his being in the face of the work as the *subject* of the situation. This consciousness comes as a result of the condition of theatricality setting the viewer in a positional relationship with the 'object of total divulgence'. Fried explains further the condition of theatricality:

> *The situation itself **belongs** to the beholder - it is his situation. Or as Morris has remarked, "I wish to emphasise that things are in a space with oneself, rather than...that one is in a space surrounded by things." Again, there is no clear or hard distinction between the two states of affairs: one is after all, **always** surrounded by things. But the things that are literalist works of art must somehow **confront** the beholder - they must, one might almost say, be placed not just in his space but **in his way**.*[264]

The object, and in this literal example the Minimalist artwork, exists outside the act of consciousness somehow; thus, the object of consciousness can always be classed as being ***there***. And this awareness of the object of consciousness 'being there' creates the space between the self and the object of consciousness. Or, a potentially discursive space is

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[264] **Art and Objecthood**, Fried, 1998, p.154.

established - there is movement around the object of consciousness in the situation of theatricality.

Similarly, although within a pictorial Realism, Pearlstein's Standing Female Model and Mirror (fig. 63), invites the beholder to 'interact' with the mediated, painted world. The viewer is invited, through the artist's mediated, organic, intercessory means, *into* the painted illusion to witness the proposed 'having been there' of the models. They are presented in such a way as to emphasise their thereness.

Thus, for the purposes of this dramatisation, the figures in the Pearlstein are *there*, in that fictive space, separate and distinguishable from their ground; *there* in readiness to become 'the something' of the beholder's consciousness. It is the mediated nature of the Pearlstein which allows this 'dualism' to operate. By this I mean that because Pearlstein has painted the models and objects in the work with different plastic values, the viewer is easily conscious of the hierarchy of the objects in relation to the ground.

Thus the viewer is able to, if you will, 'rank' the objects in the fictive space and, by acknowledging the overtly plastic aspect of the painting, rank *it* as an object also, becoming conscious of its distinguishableness from both the viewer himself and the act of viewing. Pearlstein, through his conventional rendition of his subject, assists the viewer in the ranking of the real and the unreal and eases the viewer's consciousness of *something*: he underlines the Sartrean maxim that "to be aware of an object is to separate it as an entity from its ground."[265]

This has been seen with the Literalist sculpture as well, of course - what prevails in the situation of theatricality is related but subtly different in the beholding of the Photorealist painting. An important difference between the two 'events' is the physical

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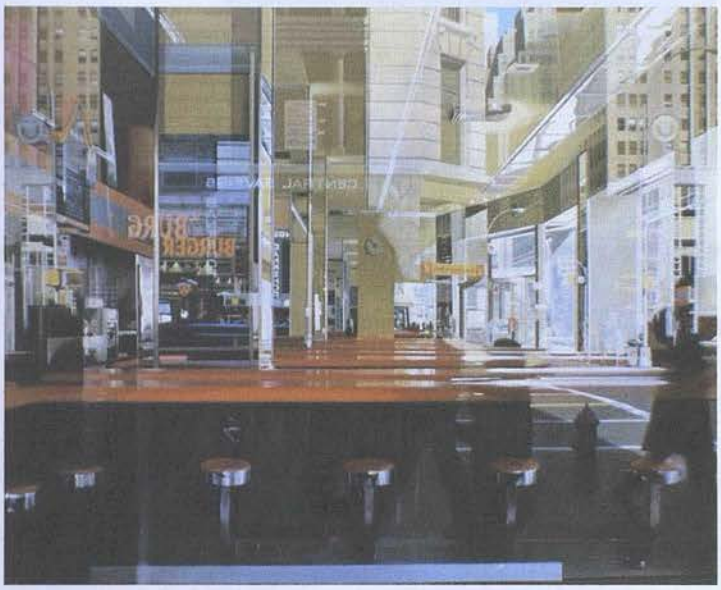
[265] **Sartre**, Howells, 1997, p. 18.

interaction with the space around the literalist artwork. As Morris noted above, the Literalist artwork is placed in the beholder's way - the object is experienced through time and in the beholder's space. Thinking again of the 'fixing' carried out by the Newman - the Photorealist painting likewise, fixes the viewer in space but does not require of the viewer a movement through space in an interaction with the artwork. Indeed, the experience in the face of the Photorealist image fixes the beholder in an 'eternal present' one might say, for even the Newman alludes to a sublime space, through the 'zip', at the other side of the metaphysical membrane.



**Central Savings**
Richard Estes 1975
**Fig. 67**

This mediated assistance, the invitation to move through space, seems negligible in a work such as John 1975 (fig. 65) or in Richard Estes Central Savings 1975 (fig. 67). The *construction* of the painting does not afford any particular passage of the canvas a 'privileged plasticity'. The meticulous rendering of the data from the photo-source, means that objects (the objects which can potentially be the *things* of the viewer's consciousness) are not ranked and placed in a hierarchy which would set them obviously apart from their *ground* (in this case the canvas surface).

In Central Savings, the solid objects, such as the diner chairs, the coffee machine and the glass facade, are given the same plastic treatement as the non-solid objects of the

scene - the reflections, the sky. Estes does not attempt to produce a plastic equivalent of each object's intrinsic qualities: glass, wood, plastic, reflection, brick, stone, are all treated evenly, in part due to the fact that they all have their genesis in the even surface data of the photograph.

**The Milkmaid**
Johannes Vermeer c.1658-60
**Fig. 68**

In this sense Photorealist painting differs *plastically* from classic Realist genre painting. Dutch still-lives, and cityscapes, for example, often used as comparisons (and as inspiration by Estes himself[266]) to the everyday in Photorealism, engage with the everyday world preserving an 'ontological' separation of entity and ground. Brief comparisons to Vermeer's The Milkmaid (fig. 68) and George Bellows's Stag at Sharkey's 1909 (fig. 69) will reinforce this point about Photorealists' homogenous plastic values - their 'superficial' picturing of the world. The art historian John Nash has analyzed the technical subtleties of this painting. He observed:

> *The representation of the loaves by a sprinkling of dabs of pale colours that suggest the light sparkling from the coarse wholemeal grain exaggerates a characteristic of both the Dresden and Frick paintings. Technically at odds with this broad optical quality is the precise representation of the flaws in the plaster of the two walls, including two nails and holes where other nails have previously been. Again the young woman's forearms are drawn in a slightly impasted paint*

[266] John Perreault notes Estes's worshipping of Vermeer's genre painting. See **Richard Estes: The Complete Paintings**, Meisel, 1986, p.10.

*that has retained the traces of brush-strokes, recalling the school of Rembrandt and Carel Fabritius.*[267]

Each object is treated appositely according to its indiosyncratic properties, and the artist's ability to mediate between the specific object in the lifeworld and the plastic equivalent is something by which the painting can be valued. Furthermore, Vermeer grounds his painting in the context of the history of images, engineering plastic connections to Rembrandt and Fabritius as Nash points out. To put this another way, the mediated technical qualities of The Milkmaid are underscored by these art historical allusions.[268]

Vermeer, then, provides each of the various objects in his painting with differing, expedient plastic values to create an artistic distinctiveness between the objects. The impasto paint on the left forearm intentionally describes the pasty skin of the maid who spends her time indoors, baking bread and preparing foodstuffs. Additionally, this impasto paint operates autonomously as a plastic value, setting itself against the thinned plasticity of the paint which approximates the milk. Hence the plastic values used by Vermeer combine in their difference to create a subtle ranking of value across the surface of the canvas which enhances the illusion of the space and proves the artist's *artistic* virtuosity.

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[267]**Vermeer**, John Nash, Scala Books, 1991, p. 94. The Dresden and Frick paintings to which he refers are the Letter Reader, and Soldier with Laughing Girl, respectively. Nash does point out with reference to Vermeer's Woman with Ewer, that the painter did not always demonstrate such diversity of plastic mark in his work. Woman with Ewer demonstrates an evenness of surface more akin, in fact, to the canvases of Estes than to the artist's early work. However, the point about the heterogeneity of mark applies with regard to The Milkmaid, so I maintain the discursive point about the emphasis of the distinction in that painting between the 'objects as entities and their ground'.

[268]For the Photorealist John Salt, this grounding in the history of images was something which he desired to avoid. Perhaps one could say that by 'avoiding' such allusions to the history of images Salt releases his images from the framework of ranking, comparison and 'authentication'. His painting is released (hypothetically of course) from the established framework of Realist practices. Whereas Vermeer intentionally alludes to the above mentioned precedents in order that his painitng and his facture might be deemed authentic realism, Salt uses the Photorealists' penchent for resemblance; he produces a painting which appears like it dove-tails with existant practices of Realism, but the construction of the painting causes some clumsy carpentry in this respect. This note connects to the following discussion of 'Glitter and Surface Time'. The use of the photograph reduces the temporal 'extent' of the painting, much to the chagrin of commentators like Benjamin and John Roberts, as is mentioned, but Salt welcomes this effect of the photograph: "The photograph wipes out art history for you," he celebrated. (See **Superrealist Painting and Sculpture**, Lyndey, 1980, p.13.)

In a way, the mediation, the artistic intervention, of Vermeer - manifested through the arrangement of plastic values on the surface of the canvas- corresponds to the impulse within Existentialism to mediate, in good faith, with the lifeworld.[269] The plastic manifestation of Vermeer's mediation, as was the case with Pearlstein's painting, eases the viewer's separating of object (entity) from its surroundings (ground). The mediation eases the viewer's positioning of himself in existential contradistinction to the phenomenological reality of the picture as illusory scene and the various objects therein.

**Stag at Sharkey's**
George Bellows 1909
**Fig. 69**

Similarly, the American painter George Bellow's Stag at Sharkey's 1909, embodied a 'charged' Realism, whose painted surface (composition, colour and paint application) enhanced the action pictured. The formal properties of such painting made the fictive scene more credible as a representation of reality, more credible perhaps than the 'un-charged' Photorealist picturing.

The Estes painting offers, contrastingly, as said, a surface with no salient value differences, and the separation of entities from ground is not immediately apparent.[270] This

[269]This might be connected to the concept in Marcel's thinking of 'desertion'. I refer again to Kruks' reading of the 'social matrix' of Existentialism. For Marcel, she argues, claimed that the order of objectivity was only encountered through our own failures - through acts of desertion. As if the primacy of the self was upstaged by an intervention from the world of mere things. Not only does Vermeer entice the viewer, encouraging him to perform an act of 'desertion' in a way, the painter also exaggerates this 'phenomenological order of things' by plastically rendering *saliently* the 'mere things' which make up his painterly fiction.

[270]This fact should be no surprise to the reader by now, as the Photorealist deals with the transposition of visual data and not the caressing of a painted surface to approximate any given material idiosyncracy of an object in a scene. Estes does, however, use the word 'values' when speaking about the information that the photo-source provides to him in the making of a painting (see **Richard Estes:The Complete Paintings**, Meisel, 1986, p. 19.). By this I understand him to mean that the photograph offers information about surface distinctions. Distinctions in terms of the area of a colour, the length and

imperceptibility of entity and ground within the facticity of the Photorealist image contradicts conventions, formal and ontological of Modern painting. Brandon Taylor discusses the importance of a dualistic ontology to Modern painting after the Romantic period. He notes that, firstly, the artist relied on a clear distinction between the world of appearance and the imagined, and, secondly, the artist perceived a difference between the lifeworld and the plastic creation which manifested itself within the frame.

> *What is experienced in the work of art itself came to be removed from all connection with actuality insofar as this content was framed (and hence marked off) from reality, and was thus seen as ontologically separate from it.*[271]

**United States with NY Skyline**
Malcolm Morley 1965
**Fig. 70**

Working in a reversal of this model explained by Taylor, the Photorealist deliberately blurs the distinction between the art and the referent in the lifeworld. Malcolm Morley was one Photorealist who played with the framing which Taylor brings to mind. In Morley's On Deck (fig. 50) and United States with NY Skyline 1965 (fig. 70), for example, the inner frame exaggerates this ontological separation of entity (painting) and ground

height of lines and objects, the limits of a shape. In other words, these 'values' are in effect diagrammatic data, concerned with the appearance of marks and pixels on a surface and not aspects of surface *quality* as is being discussed above. The transposition of the loaves of bread in The Milkmaid, had Vermeer been a Photorealist would have involved only the transposition of the loaves as shapes as they appeared in the camera obscura, and would not have involved Vermeer quizzing the empirical properties of the loaves in the run up to electing an apposite plastic rendition which would speak of the essential properties of bread.

[271] **Modernism, Postmodernism, Realism: A Critical Perspective for Art**, Brandon Taylor, Winchester: Winchester School of Art Press, 1987, p. 67.

(reality) - it emphasises the artifice of the painting as said (see 4.6). The frame sets up this ontological difference between the painting as 'entity' and the real world as 'ground' but, typically of Photorealism, this dualistic relationship is problematized by the imagery and its fabrication. The hyper-illusionism of the painting draws it nearer and nearer the scene from the everyday world and thus undercuts the painting's separation from its everyday world referent. Because of this, the framing seems redundant, for what is contained within it does not seem to 'frame', or hierarchize, or 'order', by the terms of a conventional 'Bellows' or 'Hopper' realism - the 'mere real things' (of the photograph) are merely given again. The *specialness* of traditionally framed objects, to play to Taylor's language, is critically challenged by Morley. Once more, the relationship between an entity and a ground, is complicated for the evenness of surface maintains the ineluctable connection between the finished painting and the photo-source. The scotching of traditional Realist differentiation within Photorealism (between painted sign + everyday world referent and between individual beholder + painted 'object') results in a special kind of Photorealist 'breakdown' within the structure of the image and within the act of viewing. This 'crisis' in the Photoreal image then is generated, as earlier discussions forefigured, by the special properties of the 'realist verity of the photo-source' and by the 'constructed quotidianity' - two everpresent peculiarities in Photorealist paintings which combine to locate the beholder in an oscillatory ontology.

## 5.4 Oscillation: Collapse within the Photorealist Analogon

The absence of constructed plastic difference, in the manner of Vermeer and Bellows (or Robert Rauschenberg) contributes to the analogical quality of the Photorealist painting. This quality, inseparable from the impossibility of the sign being the signified, is self-consciously pronounced in Photorealism. The telescoping of the distance between painting as sign and that which is referenced or signified plays a role in the 'oscillation' under scrutiny here.

The *attempt* to close down the gap between sign and signified, can be seen as parallel to the de-differentiation between entity and ground, both in terms of the facticity of the paintings, and in terms of the (f)act of beholding the Photorealist image. As this dramatization develops, it is possible to speak of a momentary 'collapse' within the Photorealist sign. Or, in that instant when the viewer reads the Hyperrealist sculpture, Duane Hanson's College Student 1990 (fig. 71), for example, as a bona fide, homo sapiens, the sign collapses, and the real and the replication become indistinct. But this metaphorical 'state' is short lived, for the artifice is declared and the oscillation between real and copy is in play. I want to use the term *oscillation* to refer to the self-reflexivity inherent in the compounded paradox 'inside' the Photorealist's photo-source. In short the Photorealist painting sets up

**College Student**
Duane Hanson 1990
**Fig. 71**

an 'oscillation' because, despite the appearance of a 'mere analogous copy', the chief connotative element of even the notional analogon *refers back to the myth of the photograph as the perfect analogon.*

**Linda**
Chuck Close 1975
**Fig. 72**

This reflexivity can be exemplified by Chuck Close's painting. He first thought of making paintings of photographs because he was struck by a paradoxical phenomenon when painting a still-life. The story has it that he recognised that whichever component he chose to study before translating it into paint was in sharp focus. This, he realised, was not how he wished to render the information in front of him. He wanted to more accurately investigate why we think photographs approximate the true manner in which we see. He wanted to make a painting which would provide information about the fact that our peripheral vision causes areas of the thing observed to be slightly out of focus. Traditional still-life painting, with each component being given equal 'focus' was, for Close, too distorted. Speaking in 1975, the year he painted Linda (fig. 72), Close explained:

> *No matter where I looked all parts of the still life seemed to have equal focus. Now I knew this phenomenon was not true of natural vision since peripheral vision is always blurred.*[272]

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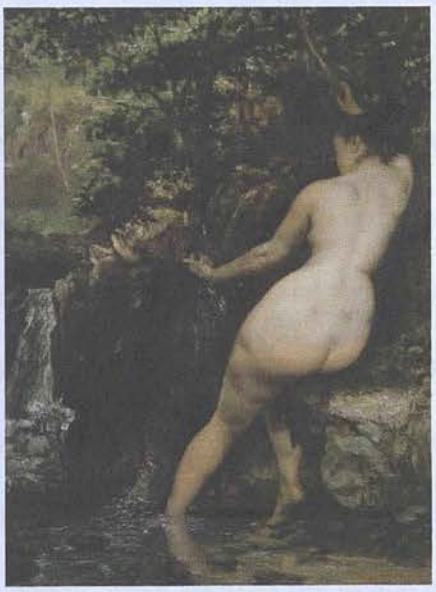
[272]Taken from interview with Cindy Nemser, **Super-Realism: A Critical Anthology,** Battcock, 1975, p.232.

Because of the photographic manner of seeing presented by his photo-source, Close draws our attention to the fact that previous illusionistic still-life or Realist painting provides an *adulterated* view of the thing observed. With its all-over focus, a Realist painting, Courbet's La Source 1868 (fig. 73) for example, does not provide us with a representation which is true to how we actually see, argues Close.

A 'Realist' painting such as Courbet's, to return to Nochlin's case-study, is in fact coded with signification; signifying that its intent is to be a work of verity. It contains more aspects of connotation, more craft and mediation. A painting such as La Source is understood to be a work of Realist-verity because it is understood within a historical syntax. "Syntax" within Barthes's discussion of the photograph, is constructed by the sequence of images. Any single image takes on added (artistic) significance as a result of it being read within a sequence. With the example of the Realist painting, the sequence is constructed by the precedents of Realist-verity within the history of images and this already-coded verity is read into La Source. The 'truth of seeing' is *connoted* by La Source and not *represented*. The nude female is seen from behind connecting iconographically to precedents such as Velazquez's Roqueby Venus and Ingre's Bather of Valpincon. Courbet's painting answers these earlier portrayals of idealized femininity. Conceptually La Source has force because it makes its case within the 'grammar' of such precedents.



**La Source**
Gustave Courbet 1868
**Fig. 73**

With the *syntax* of these precedents in mind the viewer is struck by the inclusion of cellulite in the Courbet. What was once an undesirable component, to Velazquez and Ingres at least becomes, in the Courbet, a syntactical gambit which signs 'verity'. The sequence of 'nudes from behind' within the history of images creates a grammatical context for connotation which Courbet exploits. Courbet engages in a deliberate dialogue with past masterpieces as James Rubin notes:

> *Courbet's late references to traditional representations of the nude acquire for his art an intellectual, that is, retrospective, component that he might once have avoided or denied.*[273]

Courbet's focus is on the updating and emending of representations (of the female nude) within the syntax of the history of images. He wishes to include in this emendation features of the human form omitted from earlier versions of his chosen subject - but his inclusion is governed by the tradition of how things are seen *in painting*. Courbet presents, then, in La Source a classical nude underneath the cellulite. To rephrase this with regard to Barthes's semiotics, Courbet takes the (admittedly keenly observed) *phrase* of cellulite and places it into the *sentence* of the female nude in the story of the history of images. The fabrication and artifice is rendered transparent. La Source may include a feature of an everyday female nude, but the painting remains within the syntax of fine art painting - it makes less attempt than the Photorealist painting to close down the territory between sign and signified. The 'truth' of the Close portrait, of the Photorealist image, comes about because the image is a representation of an objective way of seeing.[274]

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[273] **Courbet**, Rubin, 1997, p. 312.

[274] Of course any photograph can be manipulated in the process of dark-room artistry. Cindy Nemser, in the interview

A comparison can be made here, once again, with the manner of seeing visible in the paintings of Vermeer (fig. 68).[275]As a result of Vermeer's use of the camera obscura certain highlights in his finished pictures appear slightly 'out of focus'. The reflected light appears in the paintings of Vermeer as it would have been seen through the lens of the camera obscura. This exploitation of the qualities created by the optical device seems not to have been an embarassing betrayal of the technique but rather a desirable effect - for it brought about and comprised signals of verity, cluse that the image had been apprehended by, in the first instance, 'photographic' means. Vermeer championed the intermediary camera image because it presented the scene in a static manner. From this frozen and framed image the painter could patiently transpose all those details which would have been missed from an *en plein* air approach.

The focus and non-focus in Close's Linda, for example, comes about because of the artist's painstaking copy of the intermediary image - the finished painting in other words, like passages in Vermeer, takes on the appearance of having been seen through a lens. We as viewer are invited to see as the camera 'sees'. We are not given the all-over focus of the painted Realism of Courbet, or of Richard Estes or Don Eddy. We are given the end result of the copy of the intermediating photo-source; a painting of the 'objective' manner of seeing.

Close's Linda is paradigmatic of the photo-portraits of the 1970s: full-frontal, lacking in *objects*, in *trick effects*, in *photogenia* and in *aestheticicsm,* to reference Barthes's modes of connotation. Additionally, both *pose* and *syntax* have been deliberately restricted. The pencil lines added by the artist to accentuate the wrinkles around Linda's eyes and

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mentioned above, put this fact to Close. He replied "Right - but I never said the camera was truth. It is,however, a more accurate and more objective way of seeing." op cit p.233.

[275]Richard Estes admires the paintings of Vermeer for their lifelikeness, noted in an interview with JohnPerreault, and suggested that Vermeer would have chosen to use the modern camera if it had been available in the seventeenth century. See **Richard Estes: The Complete Paintings**, Meisel,1986, p. 20.

mouth differ semiotically from Courbet's syntactical cellulite. These wrinkles do not connote world-weariness or the accumulation of wisdom. Rather these details appear as inevitabilities of a Minimalist process of transposition.

As discussed, Courbet intended the cellulite to carry force in terms of the syntax of the depiction of the female nude in the history of images. Close's incorporation of the *previously unseen* is founded in his ascetic literalism. Of course it is the camera which allows the previously unseen to become visible. In the same way that the camera obscura facilitated the seeing of Vermeer's chosen scene in its detailed entirety, the camera allows Close to see and record details which the human eye could not hope to perceive under normal circumstances.

Any viewer might find connotative significance in Linda's lipstick, her ragged, permed hair, her exasperated look, her gaudy shirt or her wrinkles - but the conjuring of any external narrative happens without any manipulation of expectancy on the part of the artist. These idiosyncracies appear not as pieces of a satellite narrative nor access points to the essence of the sitter's underlying character. They appear in the painting because they appear in the intermediary photograph; and they appear in that photograph because they are features which appear on the surface of Linda's face. They form a chain of literal 'transposings' and not a series of transformative steps. The inclusion of the wrinkles, the acne, the bristle, the hairstyle, or whatever, cannot be seen to be the construction of text through meaningful objects. The painting becomes something other than a capturing of the 'essence and finest expression' of Linda or whomsoever; it becomes an essay in the artist's attempt at *denotated* objectivity through mechanistic literalism.

However, the one most salient 'connotation' which remains in these photo-portraits, and in other idioms within Photorealism, is the 'connotation' that the photograph presents

an objective origin for the finished painting. The portrait connotes its own putative 'truth' This co-existence of 'connotation to denotation' sets up this oscillation within the photo-portraits of Close and within Photorealist painting at large. Photorealist images do not present a series of objects, or poses; they do not conjour an orbiting narrative or text which might instruct us in reading the essential character of the sitter, for example. The chief connotation or subtext of the works does not proceed in this way *into* the illusory structures of the picture, (Hopper, Anshutz) it *returns to itself* as purportedly objective representation.

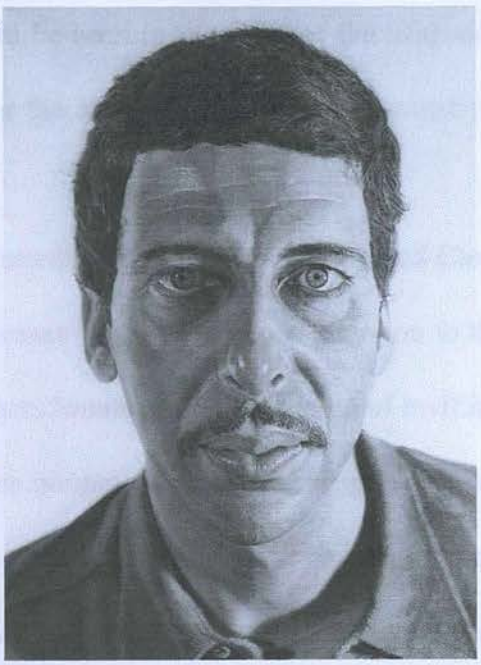
In this way, Barthes's Photographic Paradox is compounded in Close's work, firstly because the photoportrait involves implosion (the connotation doubling the myth of the perfect analogon) and, of course, because the photo-source is just that, a source - the means to a painted end. Close's paintings are representations of a photo-source which is itself a representation of a supposedly more objective manner of seeing. So something which contains such a high degree of verisimilitide is at the same time at two removes, at least, from its lifeworld referent. This paradox of the photo-portrait connoting its own 'objectivity' in a self-reflexive way, coupled with the irony of only re-presenting the superficiality of mere appearances informs the theoretical model. The paradox sets in train a number of effects which begin to describe the 'ontology of facticity' in the face of the works.

I want to analyse these two proceeding oscillations here, using Close's work as model, for it is the effect of these sequential 'turning ins' which establishes a traumatic ontology in the face of Photorealist painting, for, ultimately, as we will see, the (f)act of beholding the Photorealist image engages the viewer in oscillation of sorts between the pictorial and the theatrical.

As we have just seen, the connotated message in photo-portraits such as Klaus 1976 (fig. 74), is, paradoxically, because of its reliance on the 'objectively' seen photo-source 'that the painting is *denotative'*. The Photorealist image *connotes denotativeness.* A second oscillation emerges from this reflexive phenomenon generated by the position of the Photorealist analogon and its Minimalist construction: as the photo-portrait approaches the status of the analogon, it is undercut by its modular and mechanistic construction.

Close's dependency on the photographic 'cartoon', and the resultant (and intended) dislocation between subject and method of execution builds in this oscillation between the 'pictorial' and the 'plastic'.

Close's paintings are paintings of something, of someone, not just painstakingly constructed surfaces. They are not just large portraits, not just exercises in verisimilitude, and not just beguiling *things in themselves*: they are investigations into the problem of capturing and understanding real things more than they are Minimalist *objects* or *real things* in their own right.



**Klaus**
Chuck Close 1976
**Fig. 74**

> *Photorealism is essentially critical. Its artists do not present photographs as a more truthful way of seeing but as a means of understanding about what we do see. It is not only unconcerned with realism, it is actively concerned with artificiality.*[276]

[276] William Dykes, *The Photo as Subject:the Transformation from Photo to Photorealism in Chuck Close*, **Arts Magazine**, Feb. 1974, p.31.

The sheer scale of Close's photo-portraits clearly draws attention to the fact that they are artificial objects. They were firstly massive painted fields before they were registered as painted portraits. The size, in this context, denies that the Close photo-portraits are, to use Barthes's terminology once more, *aesthetically* similar to other portraits within the history of images. The scale of Close's photo-portraits rank them alongside the mural-sized Expressionist fields, and encourages a similar type of reading to that intended by Rothko, Newman *et al*: a painting is not a picture of anything; it is an experience. The gargantuan heads defy the viewer to comprehend them in one glance as one would a "European Modernist easel painting." Normally the face would be seen in the form of the snapshot; hand held and visible in a glance. Here Close rips the image from its usual context for seeing.

Yet the individual paint strokes add up to something in Close's work. Indeed Close chose the large format for his portraits *in order* to cause the viewer to pay attention to the detail. The colossal illusionism of his work is, at once, 'murally' intimidating *and* inviting: willing the viewer to focus on the details of the face normally overlooked despite (as well as) the impressive size of face and field. The photo-portraits are impressive and challenging through their size, an American High Modernist feature to be sure, and at the same time they are fields which encourage concentration on the mark of construction. There is oscillation between these two aspects.

The *externality* of the painting (the recognition of the fact that the painting is a representation of a head) implodes when the painting is seen as one of complex *interiority* (made up of countless painted pixels.) The depiction is not conceptually supported by its

execution, the execution (the plastic interiority) does not (should not, according to conventional aesthetic coded expectancy) *add up* to the depiction. Without coded support from the interior construction the depiction *implodes* - it returns to the surface of the canvas as *object.*

This implosion 'disallows' the painting to be either a conventional, painted portrait or a Minimalist, mechanistic field. The photo-portraits of Close are neither and both. They are an exercise in the impossibility of a *depiction* divorcing itself from its *execution* and an exercise into the impossibility of an uncontaminated *plastic abstraction*. This oscillation represents what might be classed as a plastic manifestation of *aporia* - a powerful paradox bewteen 'picture' and 'painting'.

So there are two oscillations or *implosions* within the painting of Close and other Photorealists. The first is a result of the connoted message connoting the myth of the perfect, codeless analogon. The connoted message turns in on itself and becomes again the denoted message (this takes place within the signifying structures of the photo-source). The second comes as a result of the irony of the recognisable depiction turning in on itself to draw attention to its modular construction (this takes place within the signifying structures of the photo-portrait). In both instances of 'implosion' the codes in question become rootless, are consigned to an eternal oscillation.[277] The declamatory nature of Photorealist painting is totally and ingeniously undercut by these paradoxes.

To recap, Barthes considers the photograph to be an image with the potential to connote, but he does entertain the possibility of a photographic example which would constitute the perfect analagon. This purely denotative photograph is the 'traumatic

[277]Unlike the press photograph of Barthes' discussion, Close's image receives no support from a text. The press photograph is always supported by the accompanying article even if the article is 'parasitical'; designed only to 'quicken' the viewer's intake of the image.

photograph'. Barthes posits that "the trauma is a suspension of language, a blocking of meaning."[278]

Assuming that the photograph can convince the viewer that the photographer was actually there,[279] then the photographic image of trauma or disaster becomes an image of analogical plenitude. But the image of the scene of trauma becomes structurally 'insignificant', it is an image that leaves nothing more to be said; the discursive space is sated by the totality of denotation. The traumatic image is one which involves barely any connotative programming on the part of the artist. The Close photo-source is so saturated with denotative significance that it is 'traumatic' in its own way. The photo-realist image prevents further speach, further description, as does the traumatic photograph in Barthes's analysis: for the traumatic image confronts the viewer with the *horror* of its total divulgence.

### 5.5 Traumatic Ontology

So far in this chapter we have seen that the Photorealist painting delivers the viewer to himself, more forcibly, perhaps, than even the works of Barnett Newman. On returning to himself by way of the colossal, illusionistic picture of the everyday, and by way of the minimalist facticity of the painted object, the viewer is faced with the 'traumatic divulgence' of *his own* quotidian being. In this closing subsection (although no doubt it 'releases' more than it 'closes') I want to look again at the 'state' the self finds itself in

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[278] **A Roland Barthes Reader** , Sontag, 1993, p.209.

[279] This 'convincing' is made possible by the "mystical definition of denotation" ibid. I intend to return to this concept when discussing the theories of Fried concerning the nature of the role of the viewer and Minimal art.

having been *through* the layers of the complex of Photorealist facticity. The concept of superfluity hinted at above (4.8), will reappear in some more detail with reference to a Sartrean Existential model as the *quotidian absurdity* of the Photorealist work is analyzed in more depth.[280] Following this, an update of Fried's Existential model can be made with reference to Merleau Ponty's 'revision' of Sartre's ontology. This update, which challenges the model of the primacy of subject (beholder) versus object in the world (painting), can help to define the particular ontology presented in the (f)act of beholding the Photorealist image. Here, first, I will outline the details of the differing Existential models before returning to the model of Fried to consider a more apposite version, and 'oscillating theatricality' for the beholding of Photorealist images.

Writing in 1962 the scholar John D. Wild, summed up the current thinking about the 'grounded' interest of Sartre: "Like other existentialists, Sartre is primarily interested in the concrete data of experience as they actually appear."[281] Existentialism, within this view, presents a philosophy which is grounded in a phenomenological inquiry. By being so grounded the existentialist, and perhaps the Photorealist on this count, is "anxious to reject the Kantian conception of a thing in itself behind the phenomena, and separated from them by an impassable gulf."[282]

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[280]Photorealist and Hyperrealist works are more complex, deliberately so, than 'mere' essays on the absurdity of the world of the everyday. This I maintain. Existentialist philosophy, through being grounded in a phenomenological enquiry, deals with both the absurdity and superfluity of data, objects and being - but nonetheless, a philosophical space is afforded to 'the being' of things, beyond the merely empirical. This double-edged trait of the analysis of phenomena in the everyday world has been addressed above, but Wild can be quoted again to rearticulate this seeming paradox: "Sartre goes too far when he asserts not only that the phenomena are real but that they exhaust *all* positive reality. *The appearance is an aspect of reality, not all there is.* It does not distort being. But neither does it comprehend this being in its totality. *Other aspects are there to be revealed in other ways.*"(John D. Wild, *Existentialism as a Philosophy*, in **Sartre,** Edith Kern, London: Spectrum Books, 1962, p.142. It should be said that I lay no claim to be speaking anew of any aspect of Existentialist philosphy, my intention here is to finally dramatize the nature of the facticity in the works in question. Existentialism is an extremely useful port of call in discussions of empirical certitude, of the fourth level of facticity.

[281]*Existentialism as a Philosophy*, John D. Wild, in **Sartre**, Kern, 1962, p.142.

[282]ibid., 1962, p. 142.

In Sartre's Existentialism[283] he tackles what he sees as a fundamental flaw in Descartes's Cogito. "I think therefore I am" is challenged by Sartre in his work on the knowing self. For Sartre the chief philosophical problem of Decartes's Cogito, is that it presumes a self which reflects upon the knowing-self. Sartre asks if it is not implausible to imagine consciousness being *reflected upon* by another form of consciousness. He makes it quite clear that the process of self-reflection must involve only *subject*. Again, it is not feasible for the self as subject to be reflected upon by another form of consciousness or *object*. Decartes introduced a troublesome *duality* therefore; the duality of the subject being witnessed by the 'outwith' object. Of course, this duality sets off an infinite regress (or really an infinite pro-gress, beyond the first level of consciousness) for the *outwith* consciousness which bears witness to the *reflected upon* presupposes, indeed positively requires, another *consciousness as witness* to its own knowing.[284] Poetically speaking, the line of almost pure unrecognizability between the image as the perfect analogon (illusionism) and the image as a mechanistically constructed object (materiality), can be regarded as the same instance of *subjective* purity which Sartre speaks of when answering the problem of Descartes's 'cogito'. Knowledge of objects entails a dualism of the thing reflected upon and the *positioned reflecting self.* Sartre's pure reflection allows for the reflecting self to understand that the very act of reflecting is an *absolute inwardness*; the

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[283]Set out in the seminal text **Being and Nothingness**, Jean Paul Sartre, Paris: Gallimard, 1943. I refer to the 1995 edition, trans. Hazel E. Barnes with an introduction by Mary Warnock, London: Routledge.

[284]Sartre did not eradicate dualism entirely from his own philosophies, it should be noted, although he did attempt to resolve the problem of the dual 'self' as expressed indirectly by Descartes. Dual relationships are frequent within Sartre's ontology, chiefly as a result of the relationship between the consciousness of the 'self' being partly a result of consciousness of others being conscious of the 'self'. Danto sums up this dualism with reference usefully to Descartes: "Sartre has arrived at a sort of dualism, only weakly parallel to the familiar dualism of mind and body associated with Descartes. For mind and body are logically distinct and perhaps causally independent entities, whereas the structure of consciousness and objecthood - Sartre's dualism - is much more complex."(Danto, in **Philosophy Through its Past**, Ted Honderich, (ed.), London: Penguin, 1984, p.519. The complexities of consciousness and objecthood become particularly relevant in the discussion of the bearing of Fried's theatricality on the relationship the viewer has to the 'denotative' Photorealist painting.

reflecting self understands consciousness not as an object, distanced through its being reflected upon, but as pure subject.[285]

For Merleau-Ponty,[286] Sartre's thinking continued, erroneously, to place the self-conscious self at the centre of its own *agency*. In other words, according to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre's model perpetuates the necessary separation of self from world, of 'in-itself' (*en* soi) from 'for-itself' *(pour soi)*. The linguist Graham Daniels explains this distinction. Commenting first on Sartre's ontology he writes:

> *In 'Being andNothingness', the fundamental distinction which Sartre makes between the en-soi and the pour-soi before raising in any detail the problem of the body's involvement with the world, or the subject's relationship with other subjects, readily conveys the impression that the world of objects is quite distinct from the human consciousness that reflects them, and gives consciousness, in its turn, an excessively subjective bias.*[287]

Daniels continues, explaining that on the contrary:

> *Merleau-Ponty emphasizes in the 'Phenomenology' the essential incompletion of the phenomenological method; philosophy is, in his view, an* ***infinite meditation****.*

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[285]Here I am referring to the discussion of pure and impure reflection in **Sartre: An Investigation of Some Major Themes,** Simon Glynn, London: Avebury Series in Philosophy, 1987, wherein there is also a literal real space analogy involving mirrors and the consciousness one has of touching the two index fingers simultaneously so that each finger is the touching (reflecting upon) subject. (It is eminently plausible to discuss even Sartre's more obstruse theories within the confines of literal examples and for that matter within the confines of the structures of the work of the photorealist painters and sculptors. My intention is to posit that existentialism can speak theoretically and intellectually about the interiority of Photorealism as well as the more nebulous practice of *beholding).*

[286]In 1945 Merleau-Ponty published **Phenomenology of Perception,** which intimated Existential differences between his thinking and Sartre's, which was set out two years ealrlier in **Being and Nothingness**, 1943.

[287]*Sartre and Merleau-Ponty*, Graham Daniels in **The Debate Between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty**, Jon Stewart (ed.), Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998, p. 220.

*Reflection is undertaken against an unreflected background of experience; there is no inner man,* ***it is in and through the world that man knows himself.***[288]

The relationship between *self* and phenomenological *object* in Merleau-Ponty does not rest with the self of utter and total *self-divulgence*. A return to the self, a self-consciousness of the self, may indeed be important in any ontology, but the self cannot be seen as a separate agent from the world of "causally ordered things."[289] We have seen that the Photorealist work does 'return the viewer' to the full *horror* of his irreconcilable superfluity of being. But, by introducing Maurice Merleau-Ponty's 'quarrel' with Sartre's dualistic concepts of 'for-itself' and 'in-itself', we might come to recognize a similar collapse or conflation of those two analogous elements within the Photorealist equation. We might come to realise that, unlike the essential, subjective condition of theatricality, the quotidian illusionism of Photorealism requires the beholder to be *in and through the world* as well as being aware of his/her agency in the face of the minimalist-constructed facticity of the painting.

The Photorealist 'order of things' suggests this: the interaction, or refusal of that, between viewer and Photorealist object returns the viewer to a traumatic existential self of total divulgence and, by neccessity, this preserves the distance between self and object - a preservation of the distance between *entity* and *ground*. But only for an instant. For as soon as the traumatic horror of being faced with the quotidian facticity throws[290] the viewer back

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[288]Ibid., 1998, p.221.

[289]**Situation and Human Existence: Freedom, Subjectivity and Society,** Sonia Kruks, London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, p. 116.

[290]I am conscious, once again, of employing a philosophical concept which I do not develop, or prove, by taking time out my story. Heidegger speaks of the 'thrownness' of man's existence. By this he means that the self is constructed in part by 'its' understanding that it has been thrown into a world which already precedes the self. We are all "immersed from the outset in a world already interpreted by one's fellows, a world a person must first be 'in' before he can make an 'issue' of it and himself."(**Existentialism**, David Cooper, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, p. 160.) Understandably this concept is particularly relevant to the unfolding dramatization here, especially in the attempt to characterize the two two different types of 'acute self-awareness' to be had from the monumental Minimalist painted field on the one hand, and the trivial,

to him/her-self, s/he returns to the quotidian matrix which created the dialectic in the first place. And it is in that space where s/he is trapped in an 'infinite oscillation', caught between being and representation - *thrown* into limbo; a traumatic ontology. In being so, the ontology of the beholder in the face of the Photorealist work differs from the subject/object model of Sartre (Fried), and moves closer to an ontological model befitting of an epistemology of visuality one might say (3.2).

The superfluous designation embodied in the Photorealist and Hyperrealist work does indeed implode and return the viewer to a heightened sense of 'being in the face of the work'; but this condition of self 'after having entered the Photorealist equation', can be enhanced by applying some of Merleau-Ponty's theories of self. Simply this, if, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, the viewer (philosopher) cannot "conceive of himself as a detached spectator of reality, but always a situated participant", [291] then the subject as the privileged centre of *agency* is brought into question. This 'situated participant' is, one might say, *in oscillation* in the matrix of artwork, self, awareness of the artwork, awareness of self. There is enacted a simultaneity of 'viewing experience' in an updated version of Photorealist theatricality. A viewing experience, of the self seeing itself through being located by its external quotidian world.

If this is a tenable connection, then it is worth 'updating' the comments of the experience 'in the face of' the Photorealist artwork. The Photorealist image, achieves in the viewer this heightened sense of the self, but the equation of viewing does not entail the viewer being immersed in this heightened sense of self, separated from the artwork. The 'picturing', the colossal quotidian illusion, of the Photorealist artwork doubles the acuteness by remaining in the *space of* the viewer. The quotidianity remains in the space of the

Photorealist picturing. Merleau-Ponty uses Heidegger's concept of 'thrownness' to take issue with Sartre's continued privileging of the 'self as free agent'.

[291] **Situation and Human Existence: Freedom, Subjectivity and Society**, Kruks, 1990, p. 117.

viewer's self awareness. Indeed as Merleau-Ponty would have it, the self awareness can only be acute, if it emerges in its situated form. A look again at specific works, and the photographic quality of the Photorealist painting, will emphasize this key element of an engagement with the world of things, a guard against the ontology of facticity remaining only at the level of 'self'.

At first sight (primary signification) Photorealist paintings are literally nothing more than what they 'dispassionately' depict. The space of discursive possibility is satiated by the total divulgence of the image, by the colossal illusionism, as we have seen. To a similar degree, the space of discursive possibility is closed down in the Pop image, this time by dint of the lack of intentionality on the part of the artist - but the end result is of a similar order.

Hal Foster, by way of Roland Barthes, remarks, on the 'dispassionate intention', and the tendency towards 'trauma', of the Pop artist:

> *"What pop art wants," Roland Barthes writes in 'That Old Thing Art' (1980), "is to desymbolize the object," to release the image from any deep meaning into simulacral surface. In this process the author is also released: "The pop artist does not stand* ***behind*** *his work," Barthes continues, "and he himself has no depth: he is merely the surface of his pictures, no signified, no intention, anywhere."* [292]

The perfectly superficial quality of the surface of the Photorealist painting enhances the dispassionate intentionality of the Photorealist painter, and the dispassionate style of the Photorealist matches the 'lack' of intentionality of the Warholian Pop artist. The Photorealist does not stand behind his work, authenticating his mediated scene *a la* Hopper.

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[292] **The Return of the Real**, Hal Foster, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996, p. 128.

The lack of depth, then, *in* the work and the lack of *depth* behind the work - cause the Pop image and the Photorealist image to be traumatic, according to Foster's reading of Barthes. The discursive language of Courbet's and Hopper's Realism is suspended and (according to the conventions of traditional Realism introduced thus far) meaning is blocked.

This effect is the outcome of the mythical analogon at work in the artistic equation: the traditional transaction between work and viewer within Courbet's Realism - even at its most literal as seen perhaps in La Source - is disrupted with a traumatic realism. Foster quotes Warhol in his analysis of this concept of 'traumatic realism':

> *I don't want it to be essentially the same - I want it to be* ***exactly*** *the same. Because the more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel.*[293]

By being exactly the same - the image presents itself in utter divulgence, totally replete. On this level, the Close photo-portrait shares the *traumatic* effect of much of Minimalist painting and sculpture, for it too presents no discursive space *within* the work. In the special case of the Photorealist image, as Merleau-Ponty's model invites, the traumatic effect is a combination of the facticity of the painted object itself and the colossal illusionism which 'forces' the viewer to confront 'being in the world' of the everyday.

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[293] **The Return of the Real**, Foster, 1996, p. 131.

The situation is one which places on onus of sorts on the viewer. Close's photo-portrait,Phil 1969 (fig. 75), is an object which clearly appears in the everyday world. The (extremely short) parasitic text of this image is again constituted by the title. The parasitic text in Barthes analysis "loads the image, burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination."[294] But, as we know, this material construction of acrylic on canvas is not the perfect analagon, not the perfect equivalent for it is not Philip Glass. Risking phenomenological inanity, this point is being made to demonstrate the *meta-implosion* of these photo-portraits. As the subject-matter (portrait head) is not supported by the code of construction (mechanistic [non-organic] mark-making) so too the perfectly denotative text, the declaming text, "Phil" exposes the material object to be a *representation* and not the perfect equivalent.

**Phil**
Chuck Close 1969
**Fig. 75**

The *traumatic* divulgence of the visage of Philip Glass, assisted by the text/title, on the first level of signification, seems to fill the discursive space of potential connotation with total denotation. The painting seems to invite no further speach, no further reading - all has been declaimed. The fixity of Phil's gaze 'speaks' of an aspect of this conundrum of the Cogito. Within the theoretical model, Phil can be classed as an analogue of *a self*. It has been established that this image of Phil Glass masquerades as a perfect analogon, through

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[294] **A Roland Barthes Reader,** Sontag, 1993, p.205.

its connotation imploding to underscore the myth of the traumatic denotation, as well as being utterly artificial.

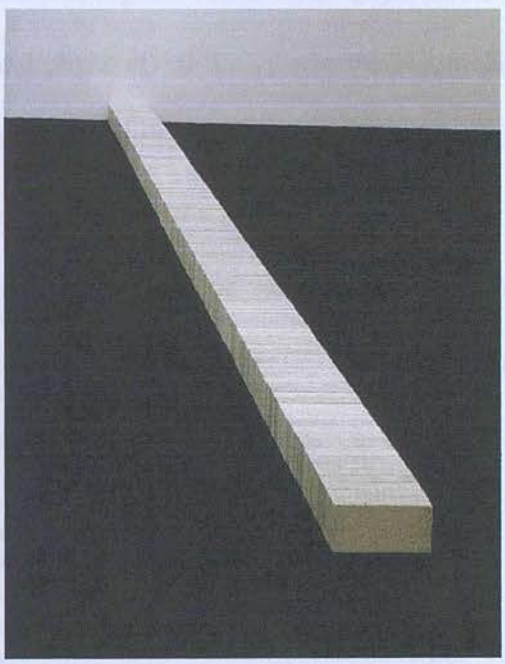
Close employs his terse titling to draw attention to the fact that the painting is a work of utter artifice - the painting, as said, is not Philip Glass the *thing in himself*. Once again the strategy of total divulgence has been used but deconstructed. The flagrancy with which this painting presents us with (denotes for us) Philip Glass is violated by this accompanying text. Using the declamatory titling strategy of Minimalism, Close disrupts the denotative symbiosis of image and text; the 'hypocrisy' of the perfect analogon is exposed and implosion on the "outermost" layer occurs. The coded Realist-verity of Phil is consigned to infinite oscillation between its own denotational deceit and the deconstructing title. Clearly work as ingeniously booby-trapped as Close's is concerned with artifice, but it is also concerned with Realism and with the assigned values of the camera-photo as being a 'truer', or at least more 'objective', way of seeing.

This totality of divulgence resists penetration, in a way, as has been mooted with reference to Richard Estes's Photorealist 'brick wall' (fig. 7). To consider such a traumatic photograph in the light of Existentialist 'real space' analogies, the traumatic photograph reflects (as in rebounds, sends back) the inquisition of the viewer. Its totality of divulgence or its perfect analogousness or its *simply being*, reasserts, initially at least, the "vertical presence" of the viewer in its artistic equation. Within Photorealist painting there is a powerful combination of the 'reflexive' effect of the traumatic image, and the theatrical effect of the facticity of the painting as *object*.

The conventional three stage equation of artist/message-transmogrification through medium-viewer/interpretation is destabilized for there is 'nothing' written into the traumatic photograph to be extricated. In this sense the objectness is not a quality of the

image but is something which enters the act of looking through the rebuttal of the beholder. Simply, the 'looking' is thrown back in the 'looker's' face by the traumatic brutality of the perfect analagon. Arguably, by the terms of this dramatization of the Photorealist image, this is a far more powerful instance of *objectness* than the objectness of Minimalist sculpture. Within the equation of the act of viewing a Minimalist sculpture, the objectness is a direct result of and continually resident within the impassive sculpture itself.

Andre's Lever (fig.76) can be seen as a classic example of this phenomenon. The potential frustration to be had from entering to the artistic equation of Andre's piece can always be deferred by the viewer reminding himself of the very *objectness* of the *thing* being viewed. There is a clear duality here of the kind Sartre saw as constituting impure reflection. The viewing subject is confronted with an object which is insurmountable through its being the perfect analogon - the perfect equivalent - and is asked to confront thereafter the act of viewing itself. But this potential implosion is defused by the very fact that the objectness of the piece in question being quite clearly not 'of the world of the self'. I maintain that the powerful objectness of the work of Close and other Photorealists is less to do with confrontational aspect of the *objectness* of the canvas and more to do with the fact that the viewer is not so much cajoled into deliberating over the act of viewing but is bullied into deliberating over the act of being. The traumatic unspeakability of our very being



**Lever**
Carl Andre
**Fig. 76**

is reinforced in the work of the photorealists, these paintings tells us that we *are*; their mantra in all its perfect axiomatic absurdity is "we are because we are" and the existentialist trauma is unleashed. For, the 'traumatic unspeakability of our very being' in the face of the Photorealist work, relies, I think, on a modified version of theatricality as discussed: this despite the fact that the Photorealist works, at least, hang on walls, and do not therefore require the viewer to move *in amongst* the work as was required with Fried's Minimalist case studies.

As we know, he specifically attacked the work of Donald Judd and Robert Morris, claiming that their work involved this 'drawing-attention-to' the act of viewing, a complicating of the viewer's position in relation to the work. The crucial fault of this 'drawing-attention-to' defines the essence of theatricality, namely, that the Minimalist/literalist work involved a sense of *duration*. Successful Modernist painting and sculpture had managed to avoid any sense of duration, argued Fried. The 'objecthood' of the art object and the position (both ideological and physical) of the viewer were somehow suspended within the operation of the successful Modernist piece.[295] To reiterate, the theoretical foundations of the photo-portraits are mirrored in the relation of the viewer to the viewing of the photoportrait. If the 'absurd' re-presentation of the familiar represents one aspect of Postminimal work then the other aspect, that of 'theatricality', is representaed by the 'duration' involved in the viewing of the works.[296] This 'duration' is caused by a

[295]This critical standpoint has been questioned by Postmodern art historians who refuse to have truck with the notion that the experience of art can take place within such a conceptual, hermetic 'space', devoid of the irregularities of 'self', 'institution' or 'ideology'. Postmodern standpoints will be discussed later as some of the social/political ramifications of this reading of Close's works are considered.

[296]To use the term 'duration', is to unavoidably include reference to the theories of Henri Bergson. And in doing so, this section on the Existential aspects of the Photorealist and Hyperrealist work connects with the critical framework of Chapter 2. Bochenski summarises Bergson's thoughts on 'duration' and its relationship to a specific quality of mind: "To sum up briefly, there are two spheres, one the sphere of spatial and rigid matter, which is the concern of the practical intellect, the other the sphere of life and enduring awareness, the province of intuition." (**Contemporary European Philosophy**, I.M. Bochenski, California: University of California Press, 1966, p.105.) Duration necessarily involves this "enduring awareness", and it sees intuition unfold through time. Curiously enough, then, the theatricality of the Literalist situation corresponds to 'intuitive duration' moreso than the Photorealist painting, which presents instead a 'rigidity' which has proven (too often) to apppeal to the practical intellect. Again, the mistake is to regard the Photorealist fixity as,

specific viewer/object interaction which can be understood as quintessentially Existentialist, but not lastingly 'subjective' in the case of the Photorealist image.

This can be illustrated by alluding to an anecdote which Hal Foster uses to introduce his book, *The Return of the Real.* Foster recounts a story about going to see some Minimalist sculpture with a friend. His friend's daughter caught their eyes as they contemplated the Robert Morris work:

> *Taken by our talk we hardly noticed his little girl as she played on the beams. But then, signaled by her mother, we looked up to see her pass through the looking glass. Yet suddenly there she was right behind us: all she had done was skip along the beams around the room. And there we were, a critic and an artist informed in contemporary art, taken to school by a six-year-old, our theory no match for her practice. For her playing of the piece conveyed not only specific concerns of Minimalist work - the tensions among the spaces we feel, the images we see, and the forms we know - but also general shifts in art over the last three decades - new interventions into space, different constructions of viewing and expanded definitions of art.*[297]

Fried's reading of Literalist theatricality is exemplified by this girl's actions, and in a way the 'event' can be seen to be an almost Cartesian model in action. Once again, the positioned reflecting self, is conscious of something, is necessarily reflecting upon

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chiefly, a reaffirmation of the facticity of the quotidian - when instead the fixing of the viewer in the face of the work should lead, as it does in the Newman, to a 'becoming of consciousness' not too disimilar to a Bergsonian perspective. The viewer who is able to accept the oscillation in the Photorealist equation between the familiarity of the quotidian and the onus-through-theatricality, properly negotiates, through time, the brick-wall which embodies the practical sphere.

[297] **The Return of the Real**, Foster, 1996, p. 16.

something, but that something is not an external object, that something is rigorously the consciousness of awareness of consciousness. This is theoretically similar to Fried's ambitious notion that the 'experience of authentic Modernist art involves the suspension both of objecthood and of the sense of duration,';[298] the fundamental difference being that Fried posits what commentators might now regard as a Modernist idealist philosophy. The Existential, even, does not posit that an awareness of the self is lost in pure reflection, or indeed that the objecthood of what is being reflected upon does not exist; the existentialist contends with the complexity caused by the implosion or oscillation within the context of viewing.

In ***Art and Objecthood***, Fried puzzled over written comments by Tony Smith; written after Morris had journeyed in a car past the semi-complete New Jersey Turnpike. The argument is interesting, and informs the above discussion of Fried's too perfect notion of the artistic equation, and the two sides are worth quoting here at some length. Morris eulogised thus:

> *This drive was a revealing experience. The road and much of the landscape was artificial, and yet it couldn't be called a work of art. On the other hand, it did something for me that art had never done. At first I didn't know what it was, but its effect was to liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art.*[299]

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[298]Harrison and Wood in their introduction to the reprint of Fried's *Art and Objecthood* in **Art in Theory,** Harrison and Wood, 1992, p. 822.

[299]Robert Morris, quoted in *Art and Objecthood* Michael Fried, reprinted in, **Art and Objecthood,** Fried, 1998, p. 158.

These notes were indicative for Fried of Smith's mistaken attitude towards sculpture, and he answered with:

> *If the turnpike, airstrips, and drill ground are not works of art, what are they? What indeed if not empty, or abandoned, situations? And what was Smith's experience if not the experience of what I have been calling theater....It is the explicitness, that is to say, the sheer persistence with which the experience presents itself as directed at him from outside (on the turnpike from outside the car) that simultaneously makes him a subject - makes him subject - and establishes the experience itself as something like that of an object, or rather, of objecthood.*[300]

Again, it is the establishing of the viewer as subject which rankled with Fried. The viewer as subject was, for him, a contamination of the artistic equation. But really what Fried describes is the very core of a Modernist existential dilemma. Smith here, effectively, describes being trapped in the perfect Existential dilemma; that of the sheer facticity of being. This entrapment need not be read as necessarily negative, but it should be seen a similar kind of 'aesthetic entrapment' exercised by the photoportrait of Phil. As said, in looking at Phil, we are reminded of the 'absurdity' of trying to look at ourself looking at ourself (the Cartesian regress), and are, in addition, with a touch of Surrealism, reminded that Phil is not us. Similarly, the power of the turnpike is expressed through its challenge to the position of the viewer through its scale and its traumatic 'unspeakableness'.

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[300]ibid., p. 159.

The 'sheer persistence with which it presents itself' is of the same magnitude as the Close photoportrait; the full-frontal, 'perfectly analogous' image interjects into the viewer's understanding of his position within the artistic equation; and interjects with a devastating twofold attack. The first is as a result of its sheer persistence, its sheer facticity; the second is as a result (and here is the crucial difference between Photorealism rendering the viewer the 'subject' and Literalist sculpture rendering the viewer the 'subject') of the viewer being able to penetrate the work visually. These final comments depend on the cridibility of the viewer's 'self' moving into the illusory space *pictured* by the Photorealist canvas.

The stereotype of the painting as window, *is* preserved to a degree in the work of Close, Estes, Goings and Salt, to name only a few of the central characters here. The viewer is not turned back on himself because of an impermeable, industrial surface like that to be found on the sculptures of Donald Judd; the viewer is not turned back by the acute awareness of 'being in the face of the work' as is the case with Newman's fields; the viewer of the Photorealist canvas can travel part way into the layers of the painted surface wherein he is snared by this Existential theme. A possible interim summary of this section might be the viewer is not only acutely aware of 'being in the face of the work', he is traumatized by this acute self awareness being caught, in turn, in the trauma of 'being *in* the face of the world'. And I intend this aporetic suggestion of the 'face' comprising 'depth'.

A return to Foster's anecdote will elaborate on this essential aporetic 'state' in the equation of viewing the Photorealist canvas, and a Conclusion might address, by way of a final sketch, not just how does it work, but *where* does the Photorealist complex of facticity *locate* the viewer?

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## Conclusion BEING *IN* AND *IN THE FACE OF* THE WORLD

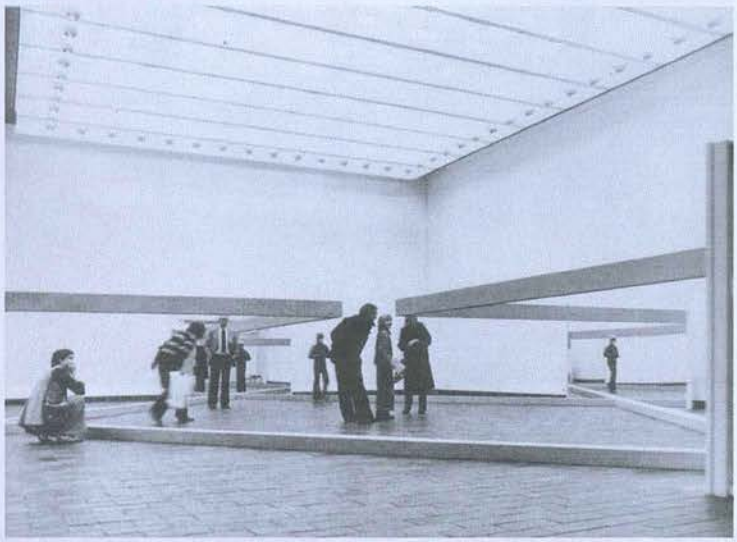
This Conclusion, as well as summarising the outcomes of the investigation of Photorealist facticity, completes the analysis of the combined effect (on the viewer) of the layers discussed above, by dramatising the final location of *the being of the* viewer in the face of the Photorealist painting. In this way, the thesis will have moved from the scenes and objects of the everyday selected as subjects by the Photorealists; through the pixels of the photographic source which 'held' the visual information of these selected scenes and objects; through the transposition of these photographic sources onto canvas; to the effect of the synthesis of image and construction on the contemporary beholder. As promised in the Introduction, this final dramatisation of the location of the beholder offers an interpretation of the eidetic essence of the complex of facticity. But before this speculative summation, and in order to substantiate it, a recap of the critical findings of the thesis is apt.

By investigating the four layers of Photorealist painting, including in the last chapter the actual beholding of the works, we have seen that the seemingly conflicting components of Pop and Minimalism play off one another constructively, and when informed by the connotations of the photographic aspects of the Photorealist painting, a deeper ontological reading of the works can be made. Thus, by applying theories of Minimalism, in response to the methods employed by the Photorealists, to the photographic imagery of the final paintings, the critical tension between the representational and abstract aspects becomes clear. The tension which has been elucidated also points by definition to the position of

Photorealism, between the 'self-centred' beholding of Minimalism and the 'quotidian-world-centred' idioms of Pop. Maintaining this position has, naturally, allowed the application of (minimalist) theories of beholding as well as (pop) ideas concerning the quotidian. Importantly, in the preceding chapter Fried's concept of theatricality was 'updated' with reference to the socially engaged self proposed by Merleau Ponty; a revision of the inextricably 'self-bound' agent of theatricality in connection to a Sartrean self. This revision has an application here, for it will be revealed that, like Merleau-Ponty's self in the world, the beholder of the Photorealist work is held in, *and* held away from the final image.

With regard to the impact of the photographic connotations within the works, I have shown that there is a collapse within the Photorealist sign which leads to a particular oscillation between the real and the represented. This closing section adds to this oscillation by identifying that the Photorealist characteristic of 'trauma' (5.5) appears *within the experience of viewing the works.* In conclusion then, in a moment, it will be shown that the Photorealist ontology of facticity is based on an oscillation between the beholder's self-acknowledgement in the face of the work and the acknowledgement of an interminable collapse at the heart of the Photorealist painting. Having been given again their everyday world of quotidianity in meticulous detail, the viewer is moved between the collosal recognition of their *being in that world* and the recognition that that world has come to them through the powerful means of the photographically-based, 'futile' replication of the things of that everyday world. The eidetic essence of the facticity of Photorealist painting concerns the beholder being simultaneously held in the face of the collosal illusionism (5.2) and being implicated in the 'constructed thereness' (5.1) of the quotidian world of his which comes to him by way of the power of the photograph.

To return, then, to Foster's anecdote to play out with the eidetic essence of Photorealism. The girl who ran *in-amongst* the Robert Morris work (fig. 77), to be lost on a trick of mirrors, made manifest the theoretical dramatisation of the Minimalist work offered by Michael Fried. She entered into the space of the work - physically. As Foster says, in agreement with Fried, Minimalist sculpture creates a new construction for viewing. As has been discussed above with reference to the work of Carl Andre, the space of the Minimalist artwork is *actual* space. It is not the illusory space of the renaissance painting, to force the distinction.



**Installation**
Robert Morris 1977
**Fig. 77**

I, as viewer, am not being *drawn in* figuratively speaking - I am, or should be, like the girl, actually in the space - amongst objects, *in amongst* and part of the work. I am *in amongst* the work - I have not transported myself into an illusory space. Foster and his companion were, if you like, frozen by previous conventions of viewing. They were held in the focal point of the artwork - they were awaiting transportation to the a metaphysical realm of pictorial and narrative fictions. The Morris installation did not offer an appropriate gateway - it was not a window *through* which to obtain the metaphysical; it was not a substance, revealing itself as a imperfect example of a grander predicate - elsewhere. In other words, Foster and colleague

entertained metaphysical potentialities instead of engaging in physical 'viewing'. They did not themselves take part in the 'theatre' of the Minimalist installation.

One remit of the Minimalist, then, was the shifting of the onus in the equation of viewing. The Minimalist piece requires this active participation. I see myself in the act of viewing the Minimalist piece. I am given myself reflectively - I rebound from the work. My gaze is directed, not through the work into its story, but at my *very being, my being-in-the-work.*

**Hot Fudge Sundae Interior**
Ralph Goings 1977
**Fig. 78**

Ralph Goings's Hot Fudge Sundae Interior 1977 (fig. 78) could have been viewed by Foster's preliminary approach to the Morris, standing, looking, from a fixed vantage point. I could rightly situate myself in the gaze[301] of the painting - allow it to look at me and draw me *in* to the narratological potential of the image. There are Hopper-like, figurative, narrative spaces which I can explore from my fixed vantage point. A gateway is presented to me which promises, before I look too closely, to transport me from the level of quotidian being. The painting, in a wonderfully conventional,

[301] Here is most certainly an opportuntiy to take these ideas in a different direction. Immediately below the surface of this discussion about looking and the 'returned gaze' there is the Lacanian discourse of sight and psychoanalysis. I will simply admit the 'lack' of development of these ideas here, and point the reader to a most relevant passage in **Return of the Real**, Foster, 1996, p. 139, where the Lacan's famous story of being 'looked at' by a sardine can, is discussed. I'm sure that there is another connection here. Lacan speaks of the moment of identification of the self, in the mirror stage, as meaning, on one level, that the child understands that there "can be a viewpoint taken on him."(*A New Ontology of Sight*, in **Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision**, David Michael Levin (ed.), California: University of California Press, 1993, p. 174.) In a strange, non-literal, way the Minimalist theatrical equation eveolved by Fried allows for the same recognition - the mirrors in the Robert Morris example above being an exaggerated example of how this happens. I suggest that there is a far more traumatic narcissistic pleasure at work in the Photorealist painting's 'gazing upon' the viewer. This is because of the Merleau-Ponty update. The viewer sights himself 'being in the face of the world' as well as being in the face of the work. In other words, the viewer does not witness himself skipping in-amongst objects in the world, he witnesses himself ensnared in the face of the world of quotidianity.

and yet paradoxical way, provides a window, an exit, a way *from* the mundanity of merely existing, of merely being 'in a space with an object'.

In doing this, in providing these points *away from* objectness, Goings presents me with the opposite of theatricality. The painting presents anti-theatrical *absorption.* Fried would have celebrated this aspect of Photorealist painting - for it harks back to the recommendation of the like-minded, anti-theatrical, Denis Diderot.[302]

If a painting presented a scene which seemed 'to go about its business', independent of the viewer, autonomous - not seeking an exaggerated interaction, then it defeated theatricality, argued Diderot. One effective way of acheiving this was to depict the figures in the work *absorbed* in their own pictorial, fictive world. As Fried himself wrote:

> *To the extent that the painter succeeded in that aim, the beholder's existence was effectively ignored or, put more strongly, denied: the figures in the painting appeared self-sufficient, autonomous, a closed system independent of, in that sense, blind to, the world of the beholder.*[303]

Such powerful absorption should allow me, the viewer, to 'leave' the site of his physical self - cause me to enter the narrative, fictive, illusory space of the painting. But with a work which presents Photorealist absorption, such as Goings's, I cannot leave my-situated-self so

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[302]A useful summary of Diderot's thoughts on this count can be found in **Art in Theory: 1648-1815**, Harrison, Wood and Geiger (eds.), pp. 581-587, 608-617 and 668-673. Amusingly, Diderot insisted in his *Disconnected Thoughts on Painting, Sculpture and Poetry*, that "Every sculpture or painting should express a great maxim, convey a lesson to the spectator; without this, it is mute." Almost in the same breath he urges: "Give preference, whenever possible, to real characters over symbolic beings."(Harrison, Wood, Geiger, p. 673.) I am tempted to turn Diderot's sentiments against themselves and claim that what he sought here for art, can actually be seen, in Goings' work. Real beings are emptied out in an existentialist narrative and the maxim is itself mute; serenely absurd, for there is nothing more the waitress in One Eleven Diner need add to the picturing. Contrast the story in Goings' One Eleven Diner with Greuze's, Girl with Dead Canary, for example.

[303]Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood,* in **Art and Objecthood,** Fried, 1980, p.234.

readily. The Photorealist image fixes *and* moves me within the structures of an aporetic image.

On entering the scene of absorption, I am confronted with the most banal quotidianity. I meet with the brick wall of mundanity - a cool, melancholic reinforcement of the banal. In a way, I am returned to considerations, not only of my own agency (vertical presence, Newman; totality of self, Sartre) but also of my own inescapable, socially-grounded, banal contingency (social self, Merleau-Ponty).

Photorealism re-presents the 'present' world of the viewer so that, figuratively speaking, the notion of an absorbed travel through fictive space is cleverly undercut. I may very well be *in* the metaphysical space, or, at least, the illusory space of the work - but the narrative therein is very much of this world. My 'site', or *situatedness*, at the fixed vantage point *in the face of the work* is 'left', for an instant, but the absorptive work entices me back to where I came from. The fictive location is a near perfect illusion of a similar 'site' to the one the viewer has figuratively vacated.

Once again, I enter, through the work, into its story, but its story is my banality, my absurd story - and immaculately rendered to boot. To reconnect with the Introduction to this thesis; the immaculate re-rendering of my banal situation 'adds insult to injury.'Such painting is a supreme example of superfluousness: it is a superficial rendering of the banal superfluity of my superfluous 'being in the face of the work'.

And this causes the trauma. A trauma which certainly has its mechanistic causations (as I hope I have shown through analysis of the theoretical substructures of the photographic image) but which also resonates on an ontological level. The viewer is caught in an oscillating, traumatic limbo - half way out of the real and half way into the realm of representation. Halfway in and halfway out, bidding for the metaphysical but remaining

*in-amongst* the physical. Halfway in and halfway out, enfolded in the membrane between "here" and "there". I may be in the metaphysical space of the work - but I am returned to the site of my earthly self - tantalised by a realm beyond the surface - but 'disappointed' when it is reached.

All this, redoubled, by the aporetic surface which carries the picturing within Photorealism. The paintings, as we have seen, are painstaking, labour intensive, but 'hostile'. The mechanistic mark should not be employed, it seems, to enhance the absorptive qualities of the fictive characters and spaces. And, of course, the Photorealist surface, on close inspection, is constructed from precisely those Minimalist modules which resisted the penetration of Foster and friend. But the colossal illusionism counterbalances the surface - and the aporia is played out. And this aporetic state is where I am taken as viewer. The images assist me in positioning myself as I 'return' from confronting my 'world of things' in a supposedly metaphysical space.

The final intention of this thesis, in the wake of these exegetical moves, has been to sketch this ultimate ontological state - this aporetic condition which marks Photorealism as a significant body of work within recent discourse on, if you will, the ontology of the epistemology of visuality. By using a complex of mundanities, a layering of facticities, the Photorealist offers an acute 'theatrical' sense of self, and then moves the beholder away from being privileged subject, to being situated in the world, because the illusionistic picturing redoubles the everydayness of the whole equation, and the beholder's 'theatrical' reflection is returned to the site of the quotidian.

Somehow, as beholder of Photorealism, I stand this side of the brick wall; but perhaps the paintings in this dissertation allow for a simultaneity, an *at onceness*, which combines, in a layered aporetic construction, the *here* and the *there*. In the face of the

Photorealist work I am *here*, grounded in an existential totality of divulgence, and yet, at once, I am *there*, situated in the world of quotidianity. Perhaps this indicates the ultimate *where* of the ontological trauma triggered by the complex of facticity in Photorealist painting.

The traumatic ontology within the works tells us that we are *here*, grounded, and *there,* thrown: we oscillate between, at once, *being in* the *face* of the world/work and being situated *in* the world/work. This aporetic position, this truly final paradox, reminding us, in turn, of our final ontological location; neither here nor there.

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